From Padi States to Commercial States

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# From Padi States to Commercial States

*Reflections on Identity and the Social Construction of Space in the Borderlands of Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar*

*Frédéric Bourdier, Maxime Boutry, Jacques Ivanoff and Olivier Ferrari*

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This work may not be in line with the ideas prevailing in the current field of French anthropology, and we must here thank the International Convention of Asian Scholars (ICAS), Paul van der Velde and Martina van den Haak in particular, for believing in a book that, we hope, will rock the boat of disciplinary confinements.

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# Preface

## The Institutionalized Zomia

In 2009, the notion of 'Zomia' emerged and suddenly became inescapable. How does one explain such a phenomenon that took even the author James Scott by surprise? The term suddenly appeared and has since become a topic of reference for conferences, classes, discussions, articles, panels, etc. We discovered this phenomenon while attending the 2010 Asian Borderlands Conference entitled 'Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation', held in Chiang Mai (Thailand), where we heard Scott talk about his book, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2010). Scott was aware, and even somewhat amused, of the criticism his work had already started to garner. 'As for the criticism that keeps coming, in journals and at conferences, I've got a thick skin', says Scott (Hammond 2011). Scott then listened to our talk on, among other topics, the subject of 'our' maritime Zomias. Amidst all the criticism and debates, the objections raised by many researchers to the disappearance of Scott's Zomia after World War II seemed to have sparked his interest. 'Academics are even now trying to make the case that the conditions he sets up for state-evading peoples may still apply, not only in Zomia, but also among Myanmar's Sea Gypsies and some groups in Africa. "There are people busy working on other Zomias, if you like", says Scott' (Hammond 2011). In fact, we decided that we would gather the works we presented at this conference, driven by Scott's interest – and by the fact that he cannot cover everything, as he told us – in a historical and contemporary study of maritime populations, namely the sea nomads.

The purpose we had in writing this book was to show how the concept seemed 'logical' to us and how we can interpret, reinterpret and use it, just as with any new concept. Within the span of a few years, the term has become a 'must' in the vocabulary of the social sciences. Yet the term did not appear out of nowhere and has not experienced such a soaring development for no reason. Furthermore, Ivanoff, in this book, rightly places the concept of Zomia within a wider framework, at the crossroads between the fields of anthropology (Condominas, Barth) and history (Winichakul, Pavin Chachavalpongpun), a discipline in which Scott, an enterprising historian, has given a new importance to anthropological studies. Anthropologists, especially French anthropologists, would very much like ethnicities to disappear in order to rid themselves of this cumbersome concept, as

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evidenced by the care that they use when discussing it. Yet finding new ways to understand the reality of peoples and their resistance skills is the whole point of anthropology. Even if these peoples do not really exist, do not assume to be related or do not have any objectives other than refusing the state, it is obvious that these Zomians, who are outside of the state's channels, have become new anthropological subjects, new ethnicities with new strategies. In fact, Scott based his study on the works of anthropologists who discussed ideology (Benjamin 1988, Ivanoff 1999) or dissimilation, a nomadic choice, regardless of whether it is subject to historical factors, such as war, colonialism and slavery.

If this is so, what then would be the point of holding a conference panel entitled 'To Be or Not to Be Zomian' at a seminar at the University of Wisconsin on the topic of the Hmong[1]? It is not a matter of thinking in order to grasp a new fashionable concept, especially if it can be seen as ineffective (in the case of the Hmong, some live in symbiosis with other state tributary communities, while others live in 'autarky') and considered as an archaic view of ethnicities. Scott presents a Zomian that is equal to the decision-makers of the centre, attributing as much value to the Zomian's culture as to that of industrialized countries. He explained the Zomian's ethnic force, as well as the Zomian's intelligence (adaptability, temporary integration, rational exploitation of resources, etc.). This is what Scott wishes to put forward by describing the prototypes of groups that make up Zomia. These mobile slash-and-burn farmers, isolated in the mountains, choose to lead this lifestyle and build their ethnicity with this in mind.

## The Manipulation of the Concept of Zomia

As we mentioned earlier, this concept can be manipulated, worn out and used in discussions in the social sciences. It is not permanent and has no heuristic value just because some renowned researchers decided so. Thus, has Zomia become a compulsory reference on which anthropologists must intellectually base themselves, organize their work and define the studied population? This is where anthropologists are mistaken when they see Scott's work as a provocation, whereas Scott himself knows that the

1 Mai Na Lee, H. Jonsson, F. Nibbs, J. R. Hickman & Yonglin Jiang (2011), 'To Zomia or Not to Zomia? Critical Ethnographic and Historical Perspectives', *Hmong in Comparative Contexts Conference*, organized by the Hmong Studies Consortium, University of Wisconsin-Madison/University of Minnesota, 4 March 2011.

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perfect Zomian does not exist. What he was putting forward, rather, was the concept of a developed culture and form of ethnicity aimed towards one goal: freedom from the state. In so doing, he prompted anthropologists to rethink the concept of ethnicity, and the relationship between nomadic and sedentary peoples and between the centres and the peripheries. He discovered a concept that is not a theory but a way to understand groups of people with common characteristics beyond the simple comparison of two techniques, two phonemes. He goes beyond reconstructions of syncretic elements, as any complex analysis would achieve highly relative isolates.

Moreover, there is no isolation. Zomians interact with lowland peoples as their counterparts in the forests and the sea, and interact with other segments of society as well (for more information on the binomial principle of sea nomads, see Ivanoff in this volume).

The term Zomia, to the surprise of Scott himself, became a key concept that anthropologists manipulate with violence and without good judgement. Scott does not question ethnicities, identity construction, trade and interactions. He simply gives characteristics and a common goal to an overall population. After all, it was a test, and it caused a stir. Nevertheless, it raised the issue. The intensive specialization of knowledge in anthropology prohibits large comparative ideas, but, as a historian, he was able to afford some 'shortcuts' that are being held against him, and, yet, that are useful to relaunch the debate on the relationship between states and minorities, centres and peripheries, nomadic and sedentary peoples. Thus, reactions, symposia and seminars arose, and a movement has tried to reduce Scott's ideas to his mistakes (though he has made quite a few, how is one to understand and discuss dozens of different ethnicities?), losing sight of the main purpose, which was to to make people think. In Hammond's article (2011), *The Battle Over Zomia*, any researcher who is interested in this concept will find whatever he or she needs to support his or her argument (whether for or against Scott; this is where the genius of Scott's idea lies, as it can be contradicted or praised, used or refused). As a result, Jonsson's work (2013) may rely too heavily on the "political crafting" of ethnicities and on the position they are trying to reinforce in regards to the 'other'. This emphasis is also reflected in the ethnic groups living within the Zomia where political crafting is a great art (see Ferrari, this volume). This shows the dynamics of these populations, which are far from being endangered.

Thus, Scott's book is a model, that is to say, its intention is to generate a discourse and is a starting point for a discussion on the use of one of the many aspects of ethnicity, yet we remain in the realm of both symbolic and

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realist imagination, which of course leads to various reactions. In fact, this was the intention.

Supporting his point of view on the existence of Zomia – which we believe to be valid, because, as we will show in this book, Zomians (whether inner or outer) do in fact exist – he was right to be provocative. He was thus able to launch a debate, proving that there was a gap in existing scholarship.

In this book, we extend the current discourse through the study of internal Zomians, because drawing a political identity that may be suitable for its survival, as well as for its survival within the state, is crucial. The work of NGOs and researchers has resulted in Zomians being considered as the relics of a past that they would like to revive but are forced to accept. So most of them end up saying to themselves "we might as well help them and integrate them"; but we know all too well that integration policies are prone to failure, as ethnicity is not dead and has always existed. Scott broke this dynamic and prompted a debate in areas that he probably had not foreseen. Thus, some researchers put the finger, sometimes too quickly, on critical issues in contemporary anthropology:

> Clunan, of the Center on Contemporary Conflict, has a different concern about Scott's stamping an expiration date on Zomia. 'It's too easy for him to say that his argument doesn't apply to the 20th and 21st centuries,' she says, 'because if it did, it would incorporate a whole bunch of pretty nasty actors,' among them insurgents, human traffickers, and terrorists. (Hammond 2011)

The human rhizome (Lejard 2011) is an example of the 'Zomian' dynamic based on migrants and traffickers. It may appear and develop 'anywhere', but it requires lines of action and agency to territorialize it, as suggested by Deleuze & Guattari (1980). They may appear in 'lost' places, among the buried ruins of a glorious past, or in the remains devastated by a tragic history. Thus, at the centre of 'nowhere', on the peripheries of two nation-states, a unique place that we have studied, Poipet, has grown in recent years. Poipet, a town at the Cambodian-Thai border on the only road between Phnom Penh and Bangkok, has become the avatar of globalization. Lejard (2011) tells us that a 'Krom' space emanates from this place, reaching into Thai territory.

Historically charged rituals then appeared. A myth explains the symbolic battle of the border through fabulous figures, but the place is thus deterritorialized as it goes beyond the simple concepts of human geography. It is a mental map that draws the history of the Khmers and of their alliances with

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Khmer-speaking Thais, from a place inhabited by migrants who are being exploited by a globalized economy. However, neither globalization, nor the researchers (Segalen 2001) or the managers who want to get rid of new ideas from people like Scott who require us to revisit misunderstood concepts such as the rhizome, nor the missionaries, can ever destroy the Zomians. This is because the Zomian, however wild, exotic, ethnic or 'other' he or she may be, is also a resistant. The Zomian has forever fascinated us and revolted us, as the nomad is not meant to exist, since the nomad contradicts the state's discourse, which is why there is such a perfect separation between the two groups.

Where Scott goes too far, in our opinion, is that this separation is not as drastic and that there are exchanges between Zomian groups that coinhabit within the states (in addition to the exchanges between Zomians and non-Zomians, that is to say between 'wild' and 'civilized' peoples). This unequal exchange has in fact reinforced the idea of populations specializing in the forest (forest 'savages') and in the sea (the sea nomads), all of whom gather their produce for the international market of product demand. States could have revealed the latencies of groups that would have specialized themselves, thanks to them. But no, it does not work this way, as cultural latency is an accumulation of experiences that take shape within an ethnicity that is suitable for a given moment among many possibilities.

Even though Jonsson (2011) may be correct in suggesting that ethnic construction is a historical phenomenon since it evolves with the times and the era (and this is why 'globalization' will not destroy them), he is wrong to base it solely on exchanges (which is what we 'must' be thinking since Barth). History, as we can see today, is a construction that is in constant mutation.

Zomia reminds us of a reality that we dare not approach: where does this ethnicity actually come from? From the accumulation of experiences, not to mention primordialism or essentialism, or the appearance of latent features in times of historical conflict (Godelier 2007)?

Thus, at the risk of repeating ourselves, this book should not be taken literally, but rather as a new way to think about ethnicity. It goes without saying that not all Zomians have fled, as some have remained within the states. But, as we will show in this book, it is not because one feigns to play the dominant people's game that one necessarily becomes different. A Zomian Hmong and a collaborating Hmong both remain Hmong. This is the strength of ethnic choices, reminding us of ideologies, choices, dissimilation and other techniques among smaller-scale societies.

# 1 Introduction

from Padi States to Commercial States

## Preliminary Remarks

Each of the contributions presented here results from the work of anthropologists[1] who have conducted research on the adaptation strategies of border populations. Certain conceptual liberties were taken in response to James C. Scott's ideas on the contemporary realities of ethnic minorities and social groups in Asia. Such peoples are all too often thought of as suffering from 'radical mutations' or 'disappearances'. The reader may encounter familiar terms such as 'Zomians'. Here, we have 'de-territorialized' this concept by moving away from the inhabitants of Scott's Zomia in order to focus on Inner Zomians: cast-out and widely dispersed migrants, modern resisters residing within ethno-national borders. Jonsson's interesting and critical comment on Scott's proposal for a historical signification of a vast hinterland area in terms of state avoidance maintains that the term Zomia is a concept-metaphor with a significant interdisciplinary potential (Jonsson 2010: 191). The anthropologist nevertheless assumes that such a conceptual construction, in spite of being ambiguous and sometimes misleading, mostly because it can be misinterpreted, not only defines the relevant historical and social dynamics: it also determines what peoples come into view as characteristics of a place and time (*ibid*.: 208). Of course, the expression Zomia does not seek to encompass all existing fluctuating situations and neither Scott nor a single precursor or commentator of his thesis ever dare to affirm such exclusiveness. Michaud (2010) worked on that question a few years ago already when he traced the concept of Zomia and introduced other works that critique it. Most importantly, Michaud's main concern consists in seeking 'to contribute to disembedding minority studies from the national straitjackets that have been imposed by academic research bound by the historical, ideological and political limits of the nation-state' (Michaud 2010: 187). We will not come back to his remarkable enterprise. What remains important for us in our book is the extended notion of inner Zomians as an element of reflection for our complementary

1 Jacques Ivanoff (French National Research Center – National Museum of Natural History), Frédéric Bourdier (French Institute for Development), Olivier Ferrari (Assistant Professor at the University of Lausanne), Maxime Boutry (associate researcher Centre Asie du Sud-Est, CNRS).

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understanding of a socio-cultural landscape that cannot be restricted to a geographical landscape.

Furthermore, we offer a caveat against taking the term 'commercial states' too literally. In this text, the term is used to highlight a transition from systems of statehood where rice farming constitutes the basis of power structures (a system in which borders move according to allegiance) to postcolonial nation-states. The latter are expansive in character, taking possession of Zomia's original territory and determining fixed borders. Even though the establishment of administrative structures greatly enabled the penetration into Zomia, the extent of the structures of control in these territories remains partial. As detailed in Scott's work, the movement of peoples (resulting from such phenomena as slavery, flight and raids), as well as the economic and cultural exchange between the padi states, as defined by Scott, and Zomia have been continuous throughout history. This shapes a social and ethnic dynamism that can be evinced on several different levels.

Our reflections should not only be seen as an analysis of the relationships between different ethnicities and their interactions with nation-states, but must be read as observations on particular strata found within these populations and other territorial groups. These various groups can be approached with more ease than those considered by Scott. In his work, a globalizing analysis was presented that was frequently more 'imagined'[2] than real. Nonetheless, the interactions between these groups are clear. Between any two populations, states or other such ensembles, the same rules can be applied: interaction becomes necessary and group identity becomes crucial in defining both the *self* and the *other*. This process is of special relevance in the embryonic moments of statehood, when dominance, however superficial, needs to be asserted. This game of domination through identity, based nowadays on territory, is illusory. This is because every category, social space, or 'interstice' (Winichakul 2003) offers a new opportunity for the rewriting of identity. An infinite parthenogenesis of identity is enacted, emanating from the interrelations between the padi states and Zomia.

Our collective work here is based on more limited relations in space and time. Rather than focusing on the huge area of Zomia, one of the contributors concentrates on a much smaller hilly zone of Cambodia in Ratanakiri Province. Bourdier's chapter guides the reader through the multitude of processes occurring in contemporary Cambodia. The social transforma-

2 Here, the term 'imagined' is to be considered the same way as it is used in Benedict Anderson's work (Anderson 1991).

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tions enacted in the Northeastern part of the country, inhabited by hill peoples, deserve particular attention with regard to recent dynamics in the borderlands. Today this scientific attention is particularly justified, as recurrent assumptions like 'identity deprivation' and obsolete notions like 'irremediable acculturation' constitute the ideological mainstreams that are transmitted and maintained by various politicians and observers, from government workers to development practitioners.

The asymmetry of this conventional approach, which consists of denying the people any capacity to adjust, to stand firm and to change, is worsened by the Lao, Vietnamese and Cambodian governments' ongoing preoccupations with the kind of ethnic cataloguing that fails to take into consideration the innovative capabilities of these groups to develop and manipulate local strategies in order to modify some of their cultural markers in a particular borderline area. Bourdier's research aims towards the concept of 'cultural effervescence'. He attempts to demonstrate, or at least show, the importance of considering an endemic capacity for cultural creativity among hill peoples in the context of intensified borderland encounters between disparate groups. He argues that the increasing complexity of these exchanges does not impact the loss of so-called 'authentic identities and cultures'. On the contrary, this contributes to the continuous reconstruction of flexible identities, comprehended as a continuum, in a Cambodian territory sharing a great number of physical, economic and social relations with Laos and Vietnam. We will argue in the other chapters that such a process is not unique: it can be found to some extent, while sustained by minor variations, within the maritime Zomia.

Zomian territory was freed from Manichean cleavages after the Cold War, and the original borders subsequently disappeared (this is why Scott cannot extend his model past the World War II era). Nonetheless, these borders, ruptured in appearance and for the sake of liberalism, can be productive of social and ethnic material. Paradoxically, these borders strengthen control and increasingly 'Zomify' groups, mostly migrants and illegal workers (Supang Chantavanich 2001), who find themselves alienated from economic ensembles (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009). The centre controls the liberalized border, and this border is an excluding one, much more than it was at the time when the padi states were opposed to Zomia. In reality, these borders were often drawn within the respective territory of the padi states or Zomia, clearly showing an analytical rupture (Zomia diluted into the nation-state) while also displaying a certain continuity throughout history (Zomians still exist to this day).

Thus, Zomia is still a concept that draws from the opposition between two ensembles and allows us to observe the region from an original angle,

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divergent from the more usual inscription of a specific social space, into a dual dynamic (either its relationship with the state or with other minorities). Here, we use a concept of exclusive yet interrelated ensembles, with Inner Zomia as the main ensemble of focus. Our research focuses on situations where peripheral or Inner Zomians are created, such as the Malays of Pattani, inhabitants of a sultanate given to Siam in 1909 (Ivanoff 2010), the interactions between sea nomads and Burmese fishermen who have colonized marine pioneer fronts[3], or the creation of exonyms that include different ethnic groups within the same national space (Ferrari 2009b). The aim is an attempt to understand whether more general and comparable dynamics are at work. We must also take into consideration the idea that Scott's analysis does not always lead to understanding the interplay of scales, an essential concept in comprehending interrelations and, more importantly, their impact on different ensembles working at various levels.

Strategies that aim to include or exclude, established by the authorities of the centre, affect the social structures of populations (both social and ethnic groups) who, in turn, have an influence on their destiny as a whole. As a result, our work is most often situated at the borders of nation-states, where the cores of populations lie that were once Zomian before they were confronted with roads, bridges and development in general. The example of the Karen is enlightening. This is a population that integrates itself within two states – Myanmar and Thailand – without denying its own identity. The actions of the Karen determine the reactions between the two states on which they rely. Nonetheless, while development projects are having a socio-economic impact on minorities (such as the Hill Tribes of Northern Thailand or the so called Montagnards of Vietnam), the imposition of ethnicity and new social relations or interrelations is also provoking processes of resistance. This is evidenced by the Brao and Tampuan, who revolted *manu militari* against the establishment of rubber plantations in North-eastern Cambodia in the early 1970s, or by the creation and subsequent manipulation of FULRO[4] in Vietnam and later on in Cambodia, as carefully investigated by Pho Dharma Quang (2006).

With the territorial divisions that preceded the colonization of pioneer fronts (or dominated spaces) and their ancient exonyms (Guérin, Hardy, Van Chinh & Tan Boon Hwee 2003), an Inner Zomian difference was created, one that is not only ethnic, such as the Chao Lay category ('inhabitants of the sea' in Thai) (Ferrari 2009b), but also socio-ethnic, as is the case of the

3 For Burmese fishermen and Moken Sea Gypsies, see Boutry & Ivanoff 2008.

4 Front Unifié pour la Libération des Races Opprimées (Vietnam).

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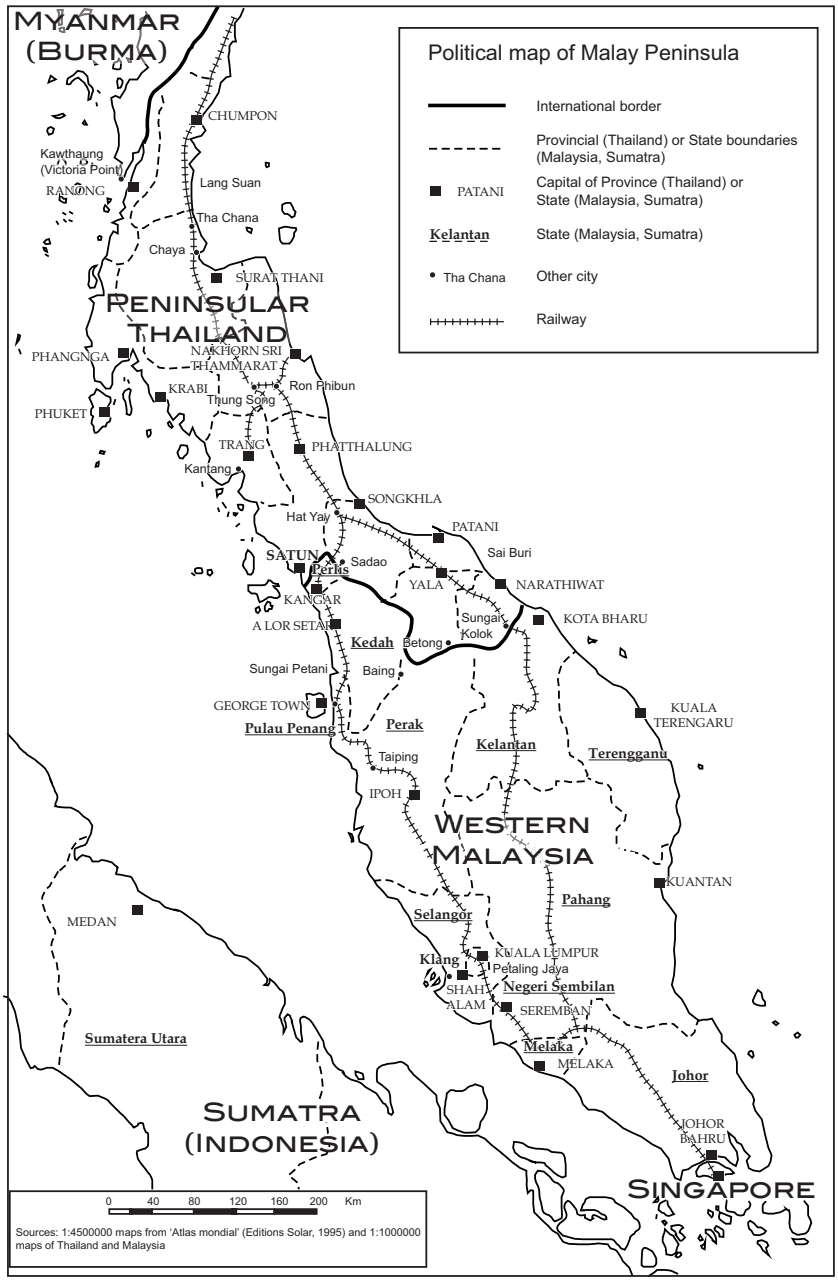
**Map 1.1 Political map of Malay Peninsula**



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Northern and Northeastern Thai farmers who became Red Shirts (representing the class struggle) in opposition to the Yellow Shirts (representing the urban middle class, who consider themselves the only 'true Thais'). This form of exclusion is developed from social bases. For example, the case of the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts can be viewed more simply as a conflict between the rural poor and the urban rich (Ivanoff 2011b). However, forms of 'endo-colonialism' (Tamara Loos 2006) – a general phenomenon in colonial and postcolonial eras – have also created socially and ethnically identifiable enclaves. Thus, Southern Thailand, despite being integrated into a nation, still functions according to codes that would be applicable to former Zomians (Ivanoff 2010). Indeed, territory appeared as an ideological construction with no genuine roots, articulated according to whoever describes its appropriation.

This appropriation, at a regional level, takes place through interrelations. This construction is beneficial to the authorities of the centre (which became commercial states with rice farming as a primary asset of development, followed by coffee, manioc and rubber, all of which contribute to the wealth of these regions) and keeps dividing the populations, not as ethnic groups versus rice farmers, but as poor versus rich, integrated Buddhist groups versus Muslims, and so forth. The fracture lines of the commercial states that succeeded the padi states reveal that Zomia has been a continuous entity, and that ancient serfs, as well as others who chose flight and freedom, were never integrated within the centres (except when they were forced to do so in a given historical period). Zomia, as an entity, was also necessary for the ideological construction of both the padi state and the nation-state. Hence, we return to the original picture: the padi state and the nation-state. The separation and the polarization of the inner parties that were not greatly distinct from one another to start with (the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts) made the importance of ethnic groups disappear. However, the resilience and strength of 'genuine' ethnic minorities has not been muted.

Zomia can also be presented as a 'rhizome', in the words of Lejard (2011), or as outside of the 'civilized' world, a fantasy created by the centre. It can be internalized and expressed along the social fracture lines that are productive of ethnicity: the question of the Shan's ethnicity *vis-à-vis* the Thais, the Kachin *vis-à-vis* the Shan or the Karen *vis-à-vis* themselves, are replaced by the issues arising from the conflict between the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts, or between Malay Muslims and Thai Buddhists. More generally, these issues are perpetuated by becoming representative of the difference between the rich and the poor, between immigrants and refugees opposed to ethno-nations and policies of cultural belonging (for instance, Thainess,

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the way of being Thai, Ferrari & Arunotai 2010). Millions of neo-Zomians are thus expelled from the centres to the peripheries that are supposed to be under their domination. These new groups are the constituents of possible social and ethnic creative forces. They allow for the expression of resilience, as is the case in Ranong (see Boutry this volume) or Rong Kluea in Thailand. These neo-Zomians make it necessary for us to rethink the borders in a way that is neither Cartesian nor linear.

## Nations and States or Nation-States?

In keeping with Scott's work, we can no longer consider all of Southeast Asia's states as a bloc of nations against a homogeneous population of peoples from the plateaus, hills and mountains, because the exchanges between both ensembles are not one-sided. A state such as Myanmar can, concurrently, distance itself from its Zomian components (for example, the separation between the state and ethnic minorities), colonize them (the delta zone of the Irrawaddy after British colonization), return to an 'ethnic centre' (the Burmese capital, Nay Pyi Daw, founded to avoid adaptation to globalization and to keep the padi state as a dominant model for statecraft) and even create new Zomias on its margins (the Burmese fishermen in Southern Myanmar today – see Boutry 2014a). All of these processes can be conducted while maintaining a project of general Burmanization in the country, through the extension of Buddhism for example. These movements can be concurrent, as there are several logical processes at work in the building of a national identity that has to include its peripheries, while still giving them a particular status in order to distance them from the centre. This national identity claims to provide cultural and political unity despite the disparity between the various groups' access to resources, and this can come to define categories or even ethnic groups (Hutterer, Rambo & Lovelace 1988, Ivanoff 2004). The Burmese of Tenasserim's maritime border are both Zomians in flight from the oppressive centre (having found greater freedom of practice in conquering a pioneer front) and vectors for the Burmanization of local traditions and practices. However, because the Burmese who moved to that particular border area adapted and mixed with local inhabitants, the Moken, this Burmanization process converged with another phenomenon, leading to a blurring of state-formulated racial and ethnic categories.

Scott's historical conceptual framework can, therefore, be extended to a contemporary context and sheds light on the relations between the centres

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and their peripheries. It also calls into question the idea that practices seem to be immutable, such as the idea that the Burmese are meant to have a fixed and unchangeable culture, or the assumption that 'wild' regions can be subject to effective Burmanization. On the contrary, we can observe a certain intrinsic adaptability within Burmese sea groups, who frequently change their religious practices, mix with others, adapt and colonize. We can extend this further by shedding light on social differences that appear within the modern padi state. To do this, we have to take legal and illegal migrants into consideration, especially those who Zomify themselves, thus excluding themselves from the norms as well as from the official and legislative frameworks of the nations' laws that were put in place to compensate for the deficit in the labour market. This process was inclusive in pre-war external Zomias, but exclusive when it comes to the populations within post-war commercial states.

The border that used to separate the centre of the padi states is now disintegrating with the increasingly globalized nature of exchanges, creating new Inner Zomias while absorbing Scott's large-scale Zomia. Nevertheless, these padi borders remain central to the ideological construction of nation-states, or as we arbitrarily name them, commercial states. We will return to this through various approaches in the four coming chapters. Between the states that pursue liberalism (Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia) and those that are nominally communist (Vietnam and Laos), there are states that are strengthened by founding strong governments in the Chinese-style of 'watched democracy' (Myanmar and Cambodia). The latter states have a tendency to concentrate their efforts on rice farming. In Myanmar, the Burmese generals build dams, while in Cambodia, a government consumed with a return to an agrarian lifestyle and an enhanced rice-oriented society – the 'Angkorian syndrome' of the association of water with human power and control (Martin 1989, 1995; Vickery 1998) – provoked the disaster brought on by the Khmer Rouge. The creation of potentially dangerous links with the past leads us, at least implicitly, to the present-day opposition between the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts of Thailand (Ferrari, Leveau, Arunotai & Ivanoff 2010). This affects the present conflict between new Zomians and is magnified into the state arena, a process that can be seen in the tensions between Cambodia and Thailand over contested territories (Ivanoff 2011a).

In the many countries of the region, the importance of rice is as political as it is financial, as both its exportation and its preparation are rewarding activities. This can be seen in the desire to create an Organization of Rice Exporting Countries (comprised of Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar). Control over water is a constant factor in managing the

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production of rice. This desire to control water also affects populations and sometimes meets resistance. For example, dissent against the dam in Pak Mum, Thailand, led to an Assembly of the Poor and to a wide variety of civic movements aimed at gaining control over local resources.

Borders got muddled, as rice, despite its status as an essential produce, became secondary in the economic emergence of Southeast Asian countries. Having moved their capitals from the centre, the padi and colonial states redistributed their accrued wealth through exchange, finance and speculation, and colonized the deltas. This 'descent towards the south', a characteristic movement of all continental Southeast Asian countries and concomitant with colonization, favoured the passage to liberalism and the creation of commercial states based on exchange while turning trading posts into cities. By controlling the deltas, the fledgling states opened new domestic routes towards their respective centres. This new economic pattern reversed the positions of Zomians within the deltas and drew them closer to the centre of the padi state.

## Inner Zomia and Globalization: the *Other* among the Self

For reasons that are not only commercial, but also social and ethnic, the new definitions of territory concerning the appropriation and sharing of resources are most often at the centre of the questions that arise from the interaction between states and minorities. One aim is to understand the way in which populations that the state wants to dispel through integration can survive through a new sharing of local resources (Ferrari 2009a) or by 'inventing' national rituals, of which the case of the Karen is a typical example (Pesses 2010). Another aim is to understand the recomposition dynamics that act within the padi states and that are undertaken by segments of ethno-national populations as well as border populations (Boutry 2011, Ivanoff 2011a). Olivier Ferrari's contribution focuses on Southern Thailand where Sea Gypsies (Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi), surrounded by dominant populations (Thai, Sino-Thai, Malay Muslims) in a territorial context where land is coveted by businessmen and where tourism and agricultural exploitation are the state's main focus, perpetuate their identity. As described by Ferrari, the Sea Gypsies have nonetheless been able to defend their territory and perpetuate their identity. His essay describes the bases upon which this Inner Zomia works: the elaboration and the management of a cosmological border – the coast – allows the Sea Gypsies to find a 'blank' in which they can define the nature of their interrelations

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with the dominant populations. By dominating the constitutive forces of the sea and the mangrove, and by being ignored by Buddhism, they have a place and a role in the ethno-regional social fabric, thus participating in the reformulation of an intermediary Zomia.

Ethnogenesis, which will be analyzed in Ferrari and Ivanoff's contributions, is a means to understand how identity is built. Here, the question is two-fold. How can people who are identified as 'ethnic groups' survive the colonization of pioneer fronts and border territories with their new economic value? And how do these populations reconstitute Zomian groups within, or at the edges of, the very nation-states that attempted to conquer Zomia? These groups have been defined and categorized by a variety of actors, including colonizers, the military, missionaries, ethnologists, administrators, dominant groups, nation-states and finally by the Zomian populations themselves. All of these definitions served different purposes and reached different conclusions. In the case where this process was undertaken by the Zomian population itself, the ethnonym defining the ethnic group took shape after a historical event that cut them from their original cultural matrix.

Scott, as a historian, did not want to elaborate on the relations between Zomia and the padi states after World War II, as their relations became much more complex than they had been previously. Moreover, the historical data needed to examine this relationship varies from one side of mainland Southeast Asia to the other. Thus, we have undertaken 'post-padi state' analyses through a series of case studies and have reflected on how borders and territories should be treated. The essays in this volume include studies on Burmese fishermen confronted with Moken Sea Gypsies on the Thai-Burmese border, on the Brao/Krung, Jarai and Tampuan in Cambodia and on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border, and on the Moklen and Urak Lawoi, both of whom are caught between Thailand's two borders with Myanmar and Malaysia, borders that Thailand intends to control by designating new ethnicities (as is the case with the Montagnards in Vietnam and with minorities in colonial Burma). These forms of ethnic construction that take place through the imposition of the central state's ideology continue to this day, as shown in the examples of the Chao Lay category, the Sea Gypsies of Southern Thailand and the Hill Tribes, the latter of which is a term used to refer to the Zomian mountain populations in other parts of the country.

What we are studying here are the modalities of the implementation of identities and the transformation of the interethnic relations provoked by development. We are dealing with identity relations that, starting from a centre, reconfigure a Zomian reality that remains geographically hard

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for the centres to access and exploit. While more remote regions are now geographically more accessible, the centre is still very far from having complete control over marginal populations, either during the colonial times (Mathieu 2009) or in periods of extreme military action, such as the Khmer Rouge period from April 1975 to January 1979 in Cambodia (Colm 2009) or during the last 50 years of Burmese military rule over Myanmar (Taylor 2009). Thus, we are attempting to understand the strategies that have been developed by the populations who are no longer external to the state and have become integrated, but who still remain 'externalized', either through their own will or through the state's paradoxical discourse resulting from a desire to integrate these groups without putting an end to stigmatization.

We are, therefore, dealing with both internal and international state borders. What happens to ethnic groups located within national social spaces, often at the core of territorial conflicts? What role does the traditional partitioning of territories (multivassalities, mandala systems or buffer populations) play in this compartmentalization and how do the new relations function between social and ethnic groups? In addition, we can ask ourselves if ethnicity can be used as a tool of resistance within contemporary contexts. Indeed, we know that ethnonyms, endonyms and exonyms have created 'tribes', as well as what Keyes (2008) calls 'fictions' (which are only fiction in appearance). Through the appropriation of external determinations, with their particular constraints or privileges, these populations find a framework within which they can rebuild their ethnicity. For some minorities, an ethnicity imposed by the whims of the centre is constructive, and not destructive. However, this is not the case everywhere. Ethnic tolerance, specific to each population, allows a certain level of adaptation without resulting in the dissolution of ethnicity as in the case between Burmese fishermen and Moken (Boutry 2014a). Thus, the opposition between Zomia and the centre provides continuity, as well as contributing to social and ethnic construction. This opposition is only the contemporary result of the interrelations that create ethnicity (Barth 1969), imbued with the necessity for historical shocks (Godelier 2009). These creations may or may not be accepted by Zomians themselves and in reality they are not pertinent to them. This feeling continues to this day, as states continue to try to understand ethnic realities by coining names and creating categories, all of which are forms of domination that those who are being categorized can bypass, as they did during the apex of the padi states.

We shall therefore try to understand the organization of an Inner Zomian zone, which is constituted by these outsiders found within states. Is a Zomia

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/ padi state relation pertinent in a post-World War II context? Yes, if we can analyze relations ethnographically, and more precisely, at local and bilateral levels, in order to understand the dynamics that are at work in identity construction processes.

For instance, FULRO, replete with all the immediate derivatives that overcame the initial spontaneity of the autonomous movement (Jones 2002), and the Karen manipulate their identity, however unsuccessful at times, as they act against a certain ideology (Harriden 2002). This implies that nomad, and by extension Zomian, populations do not use force. However, conflict and guerrilla tactics are, on the contrary, mandatory strategies for some populations who are unable to flee elsewhere or who do not elaborate strategies to safeguard their survival. Hence, we can understand the histories of ethnicities as a variety of cultural responses.

We want to underline that 'peripheral' populations were never completely integrated and most often found ways to react to ideological constraints imposed by the centre. There are cases of ethnic dynamics that are still at work, which can be analyzed through specific examples (such as the Moken), but also, according to Bourdier's contribution, through historical recompositions and reappropriations (the Jarai on both sides of the Cambodian-Vietnamese border) or, for instance, by the reappropriation of autonyms and exonyms (the Brao and the Krung). It is also clear that the links between social and ethnic groups are widening, as the commercial states' appropriation of the margins and of their Zomias drive some ethnonational segments towards the peripheries. This is true for the Burmese who became fishermen and who unexpectedly associated with the Sea Gypsies. The social reconstruction of family and economic links beyond development perspectives in border markets also functions as an excellent example of this process.

At the interfaces of these padi states, which then became commercial states, are intermediary zones, such as ethnic or religious borders (as in Pattani in Southern Thailand) and administrative borders (as in Cambodia). New groups appear, as do new ethnogeneses. The Malays in Pattani, the Khmers living in the borderlands or the marriage of Burmese fishermen to Moken women are good examples. We may, therefore, challenge those who view globalization[5] as a historical event that inevitably leads to ethnocide. Globalization is better understood as a historical event that allows for a renewal of negotiations between national groups and groups at their peripheries, all of whom are mobile. This is shown in the characteristic

5 The liberalization of exchanges since the end of the Cold War helped lead to the demise of tradition as defined by Braudel (1977).

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southward movements of ethnonational centres, which paradoxically gives an impression of fixity to nomad populations. We have to understand these common relations as organic relations, as the centre moves with its peripheries over time. Nonetheless, history is not linear. Ruptures reconfigure these relations while creating new segments, whether these are social or ethnic groups.

Therefore, globalization, the conquest of pioneer fronts and border-related territorial conflicts do not greatly change the adaptability of the populations that live or move in these places. Above all, this provides the researcher with sites where the voluntary building of ethnogenesis can be investigated. Indeed, these new dynamics and relations between the central and peripheral populations allow us to understand these mechanisms so that we may observe their workings within real-time ethnic and social contexts. It appears that nothing has actually changed in studies concerning the Far East, and that the historical ruptures that we impose on Southeast Asia through a historiography that is based on annals and norms (most often Western inspired) are not pertinent. Also, the folklorization of ethnic groups, which tends to fix them in a permanent backward state, provides them with the tools to mark their difference. We must therefore rediscover our place as observers, and understand the history of 'blanks' and 'new mobilities', which are no more than the avatars of strategies aiming to achieve adaptation and interrelationships between nomads and sedentary peoples. In this way, we will try to show that we must first understand the Zomian peripheries from the exterior as well as from the interior of the nation-state. Researchers such as Winichakul and Scott have enabled us to move our vantage points and to explain the limits of various ideas.

## Ethnogenesis: Ethnic Minorities or Social Groups?

Nowadays, the questions raised by Scott concerning the relationships between padi states and Zomia still exist. The Zomians that Bourdier focuses on in his essay were not always as such. This raises the fundamental question of the relations between ethnonational and ethnic groups. Marginalized ethnic groups are remnants of sultanates, kingdoms and dominant populations, but also of historically unknown groups. Again, this makes us question if these groups that live far from the centre have been occupying the same social structure continuously or are the remnants of a fallen dominant group, as prudently supposed by Bourdier (2009a) and by Dournes (1972). What are the relations between groups that were once

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linked or that were ethnically separated but are now geographically close? Even if it is found true that most ethnic groups, such as the Mlabri, the Moken and the Jarai (defined as such by Westerners and central authorities), are the descendants of powerful ensembles, they will still remain distant from groups that are on the way to ethnicization, such as the Malays of Pattani, a group in the process of asserting difference from the Malays of Malaysia. We can, and must, enquire into the creation of ethnicity, and ask whether we need to focus on the separation of a segment from a dominant population or a millenary construction around an ideology (the Sea Gypsies, for example). Today, we can legitimately ask when does a Moklen become a Thai Mai ('New Thai') or a Chao Lay ('Inhabitant of the Sea')? Is there simultaneity or contradiction between the imposition of an ethnicity by the state and the inner ethnicity of the population so defined?

When we look at ethnicity, we need to focus on both those who give and those who are given names. Often, we reach explanations that are not territorial, spatial or ideological: the identity in use is the result of an attack and a defence mechanism resulting from centuries of cohabitation. Experience and exchange throughout hundreds, or even thousands, of years shape these reactions. These attacks are sometimes abrupt, as in the case of the aborted attempt to deny the culture of Ratanakirian ethnic groups during the Khmer Rouge period (Colm 2009). Simultaneously, it has been demonstrated that the Tampuan involved in the guerrilla conflict in the 1980s and in the 1990s managed to maintain their way of life and, most of all, their solidarity even when they belonged to the two opposite camps: those associated with the Khmer Rouge and those associated with the government and Vietnamese forces (Thibault 2009). More generally, the long-term brutality and history of padi state imposition provides the pretext for separation.

Is globalization acting in similar ways? Let us try and answer this through a slight provocation that is nonetheless socially justified. If globalization can be seen as a new war accompanied by raids (which are more or less planned), the responses of ethnic groups will allow us to find who lies in a world of contradictory definitions. Is a Moken still a Moken after two generations of intermarriage with the Burmese? Is the answer 'yes' if there are other Moken around? Or is it 'no' if the group identity has been abandoned? Nonetheless, there will be a substrate, so the Moken category cannot disappear. Hence, where are the temporal limits and what is the cultural distance that makes a segmented group become an ethnic minority? This process is still occurring nowadays, as evinced in our studies on the Malays in Pattani, on the Moken and Moklen fishermen and on the Jarai in Cambodia. The Moken and Malay Muslims are closely related groups, whereas the Urak Lawoi,

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who come from the same matrix as the Moken according to ethnobiologists, are totally different. Genetic studies also confirmed the previously held idea that the Mlabri are linked to the Lao. On the other hand, although the Malays in Pattani are biologically close to the Moken, the Urak Lawoi, who are biologically different from the Moken, are culturally close to the Pattani Malays, illustrating that DNA similarities alone are not sufficient in understanding how adaptation strategies play out between groups.

Even if some authors, mostly in the 1980s, used to consider common biological origins as expressing historical relations, it would still not be relevant in the perspective of those who live within a particular community. In fact, as Bourdier maintains in his chapter, the underlying motivation for the hill peoples to be physically separated and, at the same time, interrelated is correlated with the fact of perceiving separation less as an act that resists togetherness than an expression in favour of strengthening emerging identities through division. Doing so helps avoid rivalry, as if social and geographical dispersions were considered a major condition of survival. Such assumptions can be found as well among the sea gypsies, and it will be put forward in the next chapters.

This leads us to question how we can retrace the genesis of ethnic categories in the absence of annals or chronicles. Is the use of oral literature, the only indigenous discourse that mentions the origins of different populations, necessary to justify the birth of an ethnicity? Ideologically speaking, yes. In the same way that centres build ideal origins with celestial, or even divine, roots, ethnic groups remember their mythical origins. But literature, unlike history, is not linear. It obeys complex schemes allowing people to play with the linearity of history. The transmission of origins is made from content (the history of origins) as much as form (the word of the ancestor does not need any framework to express ethnicity). This is the voice of the ancestors, whether we deem it real or imaginary, the trace of a past that collective genealogical amnesia does not allow us to reach. This amnesia is a cultural strategy that allows the redefinition of kinship through myths and legends, avoiding history as we conceive it, and refusing to take responsibility for a past that they themselves changed.

A one-way mode of exchange between ensembles does not allow us to reflect on ethnic groups. This is what anthropology needs to refute.

> Most of the classical American literature on the subject either implicitly or explicitly treats assimilation as a one-way process, suggesting 'an essentially unilateral approximation of one culture in the direction of the other'. (Barnett, Broom, Siegel, Yogt & Watson 1954: 988)

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In this case, there is only a one-way interaction with the dominant group. This is the idea that a majority of NGOs are imposing in the name of reconstructed ethnicities and pursuing development activities (Bourdier 2008a). They claim to act for the sake of the other's benefit, thinking that by enabling ethnic minorities to access a new level within the state they will be given a voice within the nation and be able to declare the necessity of renegotiating their associative contract, secured in legislation, governance and in the Constitution.

However, ethnic minorities do not generally want these high level discussions. They wish to remain in their territory, where their sacred forces roam and where they may control the resources.

> The eventual absorption of minorities into the dominant culture and the gradual disappearance of ethnicity are to be understood and accepted not only in terms of what they are and what they will be, but also in terms of what they should be. A theory of ethnic relations and social change becomes an ideology in disguise, which, in spirit and in practice, prescribes rather than describes. What is prescribed here is the vision of one country, one culture, one ideology, one way of feeling, thinking and doing – a loopback into a tribal existence of oneness and homogeneity. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 2)

This is supported by the dubious idea that all people want to feel integrated within the state. But, as Van den Berghe points out, '[…] it takes two to assimilate. Assimilation is sought by members of the subordinate group – granted by members of the dominant group. […] For assimilation to take place, therefore, it takes a convergence of desire for it from the subordinates and acceptance by the dominant [group].' (Van den Berghe 1971: 217)

The author observes from the beginning that this takes place within a contract that benefits the integrated person, whose potential will develop after the process has been completed. This is what happened to the Hill Tribes, who maximized their integration by appealing to the romantic notions of others, through eco-tourism, and through the production of fresh produce, including fruits, vegetables and flowers. This is also true of the Karen who are undergoing a process of unequal assimilation to have the right to be recognized and to practise their livelihood. The Burmese in Thailand will be involved in a similar process when they have access to education and nationality. But for now, they are being ignored by the state. However, this will never be the case for the sea nomads who circumvent the associative rules of this contract, putting the integrators in the right,

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while preserving their ethnicity. The proof of this lies in the fact that the more attempts made to segment or regroup them, the more they will assert themselves and emphasize their distinct history. Integration is a process that substitutes itself to history, consequently influencing ethnicity. Nomads have known this for a long time and play with it. The Karen are discovering this to be true, while the Hill Tribes learned it at a price. Today, we can cite the example of the Hmong who were recently deported from Thailand to Laos for having supported the 'wrong side' in the Vietnam War. This is not a question of ideology, as we can see from the case of the Hmong. Whether they are communist or not, the Hmong are Hill Tribes, and therefore not 'completely civilized'. Ethnic rifts cannot interfere in the relations between two nations as ethnically and politically close as Thailand and Laos.

The desire to integrate, despite the strong pressures that those who integrate have to endure, leads to the persistence of an 'ethnic sentiment', as well as a natural tendency to reunite with those that are perceived as similar.

> Contrary to the American model of assimilation, this contending hypothesis thus makes it theoretically imperative not to take assimilation and the demise of ethnicity for granted. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 3)

Van den Berghe advocates a socio-biological view:

> My central thesis is that both ethnicity and 'race' (in the social sense) are, in fact, extensions of the idioms of kinship, and that, therefore, ethnic and race sentiments are to be understood as an extended and attenuated form of kin selection. (Van den Berghe 1978: 403)

This view is based on his interpretation of the socio-biological concept of 'inclusive fitness', a phenomenon associated with a natural propensity to 'prefer kin over non-kin, and close kin over distant kin' (Van den Berghe 1978: 402). His view of ethnicity in terms of the maximization of individual fitness through nepotistic and therefore ethnocentric behaviour is essentially in concordance with that of the primordialists who see ethnicity as ascribed, 'deeply rooted, given at birth, and largely unchangeable' (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 3-4).

'Ethnic sentiment', the core characteristic of any ethnic group, is a succession of experiences shared throughout a journey that leads a people from its place of origins to its place of social expression. It is the climax of

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the group trajectory. The Moken arrived at the Mergui Archipelago after thousands of years of voyaging, with each journey detaching them segment by segment from dominant ethnicities that established themselves along riverbanks in Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. The last 'cultural shock' they endured, that of slavery, enabled the Moken to discover the Mergui Archipelago and to find fulfilment according to latent cultural codes. However, this socio-cultural climax (their traditional boats as symbols of non-accumulation, ethnonyms, rituals, exogamy and the exploitation of their own resources) only lasted until the demarcation of national parks in Thailand and the arrival of Burmese fishermen in Myanmar. From this point on, the Moken have been renegotiating their national integration on the basis of a cultural minimum: their mobility. Hence, 'in this view, ethnicity is cumulative over time, maintaining and preserving the condition prior to the point of cultural penetration, dilution or absorption on the part of the dominant.' (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008)

Indeed, it is the ethnic experience that forges ethnicity and its latent forces. However, there is no contradiction between situationalist (largely sociologically oriented) views and essentialist (largely culturally oriented) views, since these two concepts are frequently in dialogue with one another and, in the present days, more and more articulated. Minorities use both of these to survive or to disappear.

> In contrast to the primordialist and sociobiologist views of ethnicity, the other dominant view in anthropology suggests that ethnicity be best seen as a phenomenon emerging from 'a constantly evoking interaction between the nature of the local community, the available economic opportunities and the national or religious heritage of a particular group'. (Yancey *et al*. 1976: 397)

There are obvious limits to socio-biology that have been convincingly analyzed by prominent authors like Sahlins (1980) and, rather than repeating similar critics, it is still worth mentioning an example of its limits with the Urak Lawoi (sea nomads who navigate in the South of Thailand, throughout the Adang Archipelago and Lipe near the Malay border) who are in appearance, and according to ethno-biologists, different from the Moken. However, they feel close to and wish to be seen as similar to them ever since the state decided that they belonged to the same 'nomadic communities'. Hence, we can observe a form of progressive adaptation among these populations. As with the concept of Thainess, these people are able to select their own 'cultural DNA':

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> The human being is now seen as an active agent selectively and strategically presenting and displaying his ethnic emblems in ways he sees fit. Ethnicity is merely 'a thing' subjected to manipulation and differential presentation; it is not a reflection of the true self. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 5)

In fact, these theories come together in the borderlands, where we see them intertwine with ethnic practices. In sum, we could imagine the suggestion that those at the centre are primordialist while those at the margins are essentialists.

> These situationists view ethnicity more as a form and process than as content, and that it is most empirically expressive and visible along the ethnic boundaries, not in the 'centres' [sic]. (Barth 1969: 15)

Of course, we are not the only ones to declare that there are no clear lines between these two discourses. Researchers have expressed that there should be an instrumental and expressive blend of both (Rosaldo 1988).

> We can consider ethnicity as a crossroad of individual fundamentals that can be expressed on both personal and group levels as a means of cohesion. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 7)

By romanticizing practices according to preconceived ecological ideas, it has already been shown that the Karen are locked into moral obligation, even though they know how to avoid these duties (Pesses 2010). With regard to other peoples, does an urban Thai not feel part of a greater whole? Is the Buddhist urbanite not convinced of his or her integrity and necessary respect for life, while simultaneously signing contracts of destruction? The Malays of Southern Thailand wish for harmony in their lives, a wish compromised by Muslim and Buddhist conflicts. The same goes for the Moken, who are compromised by Burmese fishermen and Thai national parks (Ivanoff 2004, 2010). They must adapt, as border minorities know how to do. They have developed their own strategies and do not need others to dictate the best methods to them.

## Identity Construction in the Borderlands

The following essays are the revised versions of oral presentations prepared for the Asian Borderlands Conference held in Chiang Mai (Thailand) in No-

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vember 2010. Our main purpose was to challenge the prevailing concept that associates borderlands with marginalization and deprivation. Conversely, borderlands in Asia, or at least in Southeast Asia, are no longer remote areas and now play a productive role in the region. One of the ideas of our panel was to show the potential and the capacity of borderlands to develop new identities. These identities are not just colourful and playful expressions of the past brought into a contemporary context, but are rather the product of cultural, social, political and economical actions that need to be deciphered.

So far, spatial political boundaries have been perceived in terms of physical limitations and population movement control. In the literature on this synchronic and reductionist dimension, such a focus, which has obsessive tendencies, arbitrarily creates the illusion of a false divide between borderlands and centres[6], despite pioneering exchanges that take place in various fields of society (beyond the oft-mentioned transactional and economic interactions). Ideas and practices are also in circulation between different peoples, and this process is not just a passing or ephemeral phenomenon of transition from one ethnic identity to another.

Opposing the dominant view, we suggest here that borderlands are auspicious places for engendering new social and cultural dynamics. Anthropological research undertaken in certain parts of the world has demonstrated that, beyond appearances, contact between people living in borderland areas need not contribute to the weakening of local identities (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008, Horstmann 2002b).

However, such research is mostly focused on North and South America, Central Asia and the Pacific Islands. Strangely, such studies remain rare in Southeast Asia, even though it is well-known as a place that has generated many successive encounters and exchanges between different peoples, due in part to its location. In that respect, our intentions were to bring into focus the processes occurring in this part of Asia. Our research was not conducted on a regional scale. Rather, it concerns specific areas of Southeast Asia. Firstly, we assume that borderlands reveal local identities. Chances of mutual interference are increased and, occasionally, the option of restructuring and actualizing relationships between groups through the sharing of common features arises. In other words, borderlands redeploy and strengthen people's material and symbolic referents, which are in turn part of an identity, which is itself in perpetual negotiation.

6 Among the centre-periphery relations models, the one proposed by Rokkan and Urwin (1983) has been widely used in the study of ethnic minorities' conflicts with states.

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These new modes of interference across the border demarcation do not appear in a socio-cultural vacuum and, instead of focusing on what is lost and forgotten in a built-up and fluctuating geographical context, we should identify emerging and innovative configurations of identity and culture. In short, things are gained as well as lost in the shaping of a social milieu in cohabitation circumstances. In order to illustrate these dynamics of exchange, rooted in encounters between people living in the borderlands, we pay special attention to the people living at the frontiers of different types of borders: maritime and terrestrial.

We can observe that there are conflicts throughout these crossborder networks as well as within the project developments that want to use them to polycentralize the region (the IMG Growth Triangle, the Greater Mekong Subregion). This phenomenon only reinforces mafia networks and human trade. This demand for development around geographic cores, identified by development agencies, provokes reactions and necessitates the redistribution of migratory flows. But how could the millions of people needed to complete these ideological and market-driven plans be relocated to these areas? Here, we find a world of movement free from barriers (the barriers of those who are prisoners of the market), but which results directly in the development of slavery-related trade practices. The ideological system that was put in place has provoked a chain reaction in networks of human trafficking (from Myanmar to Thailand) and has redefined the economic policies of countries that see opportunities to solve their internal cultural and demographic imbalances (for example, the Javanese versus the Dayaks or the Kinh from Vietnam versus the Montagnards). In response, government agencies and NGOs found human rights commissions and anti-human trafficking projects and try to implement good governance practices. In short, Western ideology is imposed, while spontaneous or trafficked migration continues, manipulated by the elites. This is clearly the case in South Thailand, where the Burmese workforce remains essential for the region's development but needs to be controlled, primarily through governmental registration campaigns and NGO intervention (in health and education for example). However, the government is the agent most aware of the necessity of maintaining this Burmese workforce in illegality in order for the main sectors (fisheries, construction, rubber plantations) to remain competitive (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009, Boutry this volume).

There is also internationalized migration: the Hmong diaspora, Southeast Asian prostitution networks in Japan and Muslim workers in the United Arab Emirates. Another type of migration that has developed is linked to tourism, acting like a veil to hide the incessant movements of workers and

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prostitutes. New communication technologies have also promoted a certain form of indigenism, a desire to develop crossborder mobility and identity through the use of technology (Horstmann 2006).

In the same way, we can observe that the Burmese in South Thailand have been gathered into ghettos, where some NGOs are permitted to give them education and medical care within certain limits. Children have the right to education according to the Thai Constitution, and this is provided to them. They are provided with some medical care, but no hospitals are being built, fearing that the Burmese would arrive in greater numbers, replete with diseases. Thus, a system of Burmese migration control was founded, to which there is a double advantage: the acquisition of economic slave labour, which can be called upon or tossed aside at any time, and at a maximum profit.

We must emphasize forms of cultural resilience, which, far from being folklorized ethnic residues, cultivate local and regional agreements that provide for mobility, in contradiction with the high-level policies, projects and attempts to put an end to migration and human trafficking. These borders are uncontrollable, and nations have ceaselessly tried to colonize them by generating underground mafia networks and methods of cultural resistance.

A 'high identity' is a form of imagined community (Anderson 1991), a means to speak of a political and social organization beyond the borders of people. These ethnic borders are a phenomenon that the state wants to dominate in the name of an ethnic superiority in which nationalism provokes intolerance. Borders must thus become part of a 'high ethnicity' represented by the ethno-nation, imposed either by force (the border brigades in Myanmar) or by integration (as seen in Thailand).

In insular Southeast Asia, disintegrated empires and states cannot be recovered, notably because of the absence of a 'caste' of mandarins, previously responsible for the preservation of the political and cultural foundations of the nation. Thus, the fall of these earlier state systems provoked rifts in the ties that had once linked social groups together: the 'people', the elite, the 'nationals' and the 'peripherals'. Islam came to fill that void and helped to rebuild ties between the different components of a territory that defined itself according to the norms of evolutionist identity classifications. However, we must not forget that Islam had to syncretize with tradition, without which it would never have spread.

At the same time, globalization may generate different sources of reactionary forces, whether in the religious sphere (increase in conversions, new reactions to the Buddhist *sangha* or the perceived lax attitude to faith

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on the part of some Muslims) or the cultural sphere (ethnicity is used as a defensive shield against development and becomes a tool to group together disparate peoples, of which FULRO, at the time of its creation, can be seen as an example). It therefore transgresses onto the interaction between groups. Naturally, globalization raises questions for numerous societies that must think about their future, as evinced in Moken communities. These groups no longer exist in a world that they thought was their own. The Burmese and the market economy, however minimal their impact may be, have penetrated into the islands. Their ethnic climax has collapsed, giving birth to perplexity in the shape of lesser mobility, fewer resources and fewer places to seek refuge, and increasing mortality rates and state intervention policies.

When they are protected in national parks, the Moken turn to their traditions and become reactionaries. However, in Myanmar, they let inter-ethnic relations run their course. They are 'on hold', looking for a new path in today's modern world, which has been imposed upon them since the privatization of the fishing industry brought thousands of Burmese to their waters. Nevertheless, their mobility, which is at the heart of their ethnicity, has remained unaffected and has been redeployed according to new criteria. They even used rebuilt villages to sedentarize themselves after the tsunami as a stepping-stone in the construction of their new nomadic map. Segmentation, a consequence of state-imposed border conditions, has enabled several strategies to take shape: southward mobility, the strengthening of ties with their distant relatives in Thailand and cultural exogamy in Myanmar. Thus, a certain form of ethnicity survives at the borders, and this supports the aforementioned idea that, in ethnic terms, the centre is primordialist and its margins are essentialist.

Despite these ethnic groups' capacity to adapt, ethnicity is still instrumentalized in the margins – by governments (for example Myanmar classifying its minorities) or by NGOs (for example in Thailand's hill tribes to supposedly eradicate drug cultivation) – so that central policies are able to mute 'pockets of resistance' in the name of plans for national integration, a crucial prerequisite for globalization.

> It is also in these places where the situationist view of man begins to gain plausibility. Ethnicity becomes changeable, culturally and ecologically defined, and spiritually sensitive. The classical views hold that it is at the boundaries where ethnic action happens, more dramatically so when either cooperative or conflictual relationships between ethnic groups need to be strategized and enacted with obvious political and economic consequences. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 8)

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Certain social classes, particular groups or segments of ethnic groups may have particular interests in exploiting the same niches. Ethnic groups will overcome barriers to improve their own access to resources. This does not require that they forcibly abandon their ethnic group. However, we should insist on observing the following points:

1. There is no such thing as ethnic abandonment. There will always be a substrate and a reserve of knowledge that can enable ethnic recovery (such as technical knowledge, plant gathering or spirit worshipping).
2. It is possible for two or more groups to work together, even while sharing a particular niche, due to ethnicity and its related corpus of knowledge.

Moreover, two groups can enter the same field of opportunities, sharing resources in two specialized niches, in actions that extend beyond the development of idealized ethnicity. Even though the Burmese descent to the South of Myanmar has resulted in transforming Moken identity markers, thus resulting in them having to recompose their ideology (which previously prohibited fishing and education), both parties have made compromises to survive in the modern world. This phenomenon has occurred without violence, further evinced in the opposition (of form) between Christianized populations (the Karen, for example) and the Central Buddhists. The common denominator in these new border interactions is the desire to control resources and to not leave them in the hands of the enemy or the *other* (a failure of the Burmese border brigade). When a group abandons its resources, it tends to find a means to preserve its ethnicity, which is under threat. The Karen in Thailand have thus adopted an appearance of 'noble savages' in order to survive and have courted the ideological projections of the 'international community'.

We could give numerous examples to show how the movements of populations and quarrels over the appropriation of resources have pushed threatened peoples in their own ecosystems to rise to various challenges (see Ivanoff and Ferrari this volume). A nation may eliminate difference to then reconstruct it in its own image and display people as museum artefacts. For the Moken in Myanmar, however, fifty to seventy years of oppression has not kept them from transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other or separated them from their ethnic heart. This rebellious movement, in the face of unbearable pressure, is the consequence of the southward descent of thousands of Burmese after the privatization of fishing (Boutry this volume). The ethnic heart has always been protected through the maintenance of mobility outside of national parks and on forgotten nomad routes with cultural exogamy and millenarian movements. This makes this

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event a departure in pure Moken style. Each group has reacted in different ways, which shows the suppleness of the 'ethnic bark' and how even great changes in the history of a group may not always affect the deeply rooted knowledge at the centre of a particular ethnic identity.

The imposition of borders and the pressure endured under the centre's control provoke other strains, leading to new desires and possibilities for adaptation. The border thus enables one to clearly draw the ethnic limits of each group. These limits make any group put their existence to the fore, in order to add new meanings to their development within a centre that defines itself through its margins. The relations between minorities and majorities depend on access to and the availability of resources. Minorities put their cultural differences in a state of hibernation for the shortest period of integration needed to meet national and international criteria.

Some adaptations that seem to make ethnicity disappear may momentarily occur, but regardless of whether this takes place in the realm of language, culture or costume, none of these markers can be seen as proof of ethnicity. These arenas are also changeable, and even disposable. On the other hand, they can be highlighted to reassert a particular ethnicity.

> So, in the fringes as well as in the centre, ethnicity is instrumental and expressive in usage. The ethnic actor is fully aware and alert. He does not assimilate. Neither does he engage in 'passing' into or among the other dominant group; nor does he have a 'double identity', leading a 'double life'. (Chan Kwok Bun & Tong Cheek Kiong 2008: 9)

The above remark is mostly correct, except when it comes to the relation between the border and the centre, where 'double identities' develop, since one of these identities is the 'ethnic pretense' of a displaced population threatened by others. The main ethnic identity remains within a group for a long period of time (as seen in the example of the Moken – see Ivanoff this volume – or in the re-establishment of rituals in Cambodia subsequent to the demise of the Khmer Rouge). The secondary identity is reserved for the outside world and is an extension of the primary identity. This is one example of a variety of techniques for survival and protection. These can undermine integration and assimilation, but minority groups are never truly integrated within a particular country. An illusion of national integration must be maintained, which is the Thai nation's strong point (at least until 2008). This is why pluralism is a necessary precondition for integration, a process only possible in democratic societies. However, within these societies, where there is less violence and conflict (as opposed to border brigades,

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armed conflicts in Myanmar and refugee camps in Thailand[7]), there are no implications made or tendencies to catalogue people under the guise of equality and multiculturalism, and this is a state system that inhibits interactions and blocks the traditional workings of the previous and existing multicultural social systems of the region.

Ethnicity is a fundamental cultural tool that allows minorities to adapt. However, it has been used to create stable ethnic perimeters that the state can control. For the centre, the enemy must be identified before being defeated. Recently, for example, a Chao Lay ethnicity ('people of the sea' in Thai) has been created, regrouping three distinct groups and excluding 'foreign' segments (those that live in Malaysia or in Myanmar). This new configuration is acceptable insofar as these three groups have historical ties, but it imposes a certain degree of flexibility to the categorization of ethnic groups, leading us to ask whether the Moken of Myanmar are Chao Lay. In attempting to construct a specific national identity, based on the exploitation of the environment, these populations are forced to invent new criteria of identity. The 'excluded' ethnic segments are made to reflect on their own positions within the state. However, in the end, this only leads to social construction and the revival either of 'ethnic sentiment' (Moken) or a sense of integration (the Moklen, for the treatment of whom Myanmar is demonized). The Chao Lay group is constructed on the historical model of the Chao Khao (the Hill Tribes) and on the environment (the 'wild' hills or the 'wild' sea), which represents the 'void territory' that allows for the reconstruction of identities from within the centre. But the challenges to the state are now different, and the border no longer represents the same threat. We must look to the definitions of identities and ethnic groupings made from and by the centre, which reveal a permanence in the concept of marginal populations that goes beyond both the mere danger of invasion and the porous nature of communist ideas in the 1960s.

Before proceeding further with the next chapters, we need to express our methodological initiative: each one of us has undertaken various long-term fieldworks within our respective area under scrutiny. The legacy of our ethnographic past[8] does not mean that we simply offer old ideas that have been repackaged. Zomia appeared as a new concept for us in 2009

7 Whether we choose to discuss violence in democratic societies or not is another matter.

8 Bourdier has done repeated fieldwork in Ratanakiri from 1994 onwards up to the present in 2012; Jacques Ivanoff has been studying the Moken and the populations of South Thailand for 25 years; Maxime Boutry, living in Myanmar, has done fieldwork in Myanmar "frontiers" (Tenasserim, Ayeyawarddy) for 10 years; Olivier Ferrari lived for 3 years among the Moklen and Urak lawoi in South Thailand.

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deserving particular and fresh attention while we continued our work in the borderlands. Ideas have been reshaped in this context and we therefore tried to strengthen our analysis through new theoretical and methodological inputs. This has led us to reconsider the way we previously tried to approach various forms of interferences and interrelations prevailing in the micro-societies we have been in touch with. Recent ethnographic investigations, mostly from 2009 onwards, that have not been discussed in our previous writings (including in the most recent ones) have been done in order to identify and clarify some of the assertions that we are going to propose in the following chapters.

# 2 Populations on the Move in the Borderlands of Northeast Cambodia

## Socio-Economic Changes and Identity Creation

*Frédéric Bourdier*

The present essay focuses on borderlands, identity creation and its consequent concept of ethnic flexibility. As clarified in the introduction, the notion of boundary is not restricted to a spatial administrative limit for the reason that it could neglect sections of local groups, widely dispersed migrants and modern resisters residing within ethno-national borders. As it has been justified by recognised scholars working on borderlands, 'border can by no means be limited to a territorial line. It extends deep into the heart of the national territory – into the centre itself – to every agency with the alien [...]' (Horstmann 2006). The term boundary needs to be understood in a more integrated representation. It should encompass the symbolic space of human encounters, contributing to the emergence of new social assemblages. It should reflect the existence of a particular hybrid socio-cultural landscape within a geographical setting in which both notions of centre and periphery can oscillate, be obsolete or revitalised. That is why this chapter deals with the construction and representation of internal boundaries, real or imagined, within a given territory that is shared by groups of people having different or (pretended) common origins. Under these circumstances, I pay less attention to methodological issues that focus on general implications of the creation of international boundaries, which, too frequently, offer tautological elements of reflection (generator of unexpected results, places constituted by the state, space of intensified control, etc.). Such has been the case for the geographer Baird (2010) who keeps concentrating on the administrative demarcation line between Laos and Cambodia. Such reductionist understanding leads to unsolved contradictions when the author envisions new places of relative independence (*op. cit.* 2010: 280) while, simultaneously, rejecting the notion of non-state place – a notion that, at the most, is nothing but pure evidence in a state building context. His analysis moreover remains incomplete, and demonstrates his inability to catch the essence of resistance at the micro-level. In fact he overlooks the discrete appearance of internal boundaries resulting from incessant movements and encounters not only among Brao,

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separated since 1904 by the new international border, but between this ethnic group and other neighbouring social units.

This deliberate choice for orienting the chapter in such a comprehensive way by incorporating internal boundaries is supported by two aims. Firstly, it started with the intention to create a guide of fieldwork practices and ethnographic experiences in various parts of Southeast Asia (mostly in Cambodia) based on my research experience at a number of borderlands in South America (Brazil, Surinam, Guyana) and in the Indian subcontinent (West Bengal, Mizoram). Almost everywhere, even when I was not working directly on the issue at hand, I came to realize that borderlands appeared as a privileged ethnographic point of observation for deciphering vibrant social networks and interethnic situations that would be difficult to appreciate with similar intensity elsewhere. Astonishingly, such an occurrence came into sight when focusing on general topics like kinship, exchange and social organization (Bourdier 2009b), but also when dealing with some specific, and apparently non-related, research topics related to health explorations (Bourdier 1998a, 2004). In addition, these heterogeneous geographic places, inhabited by various mutually interacting social groups, were symptomatic of a collective, economic and cultural effervescence.

The second, and complementary, rationale concerns a theoretical interest in the question of the historical construction of borderlands and marginalization. One has to realize that we are dealing with a history constructed by outsiders and academics who had the tendency to use their own systems of value and categorization, and who have imposed their personal interpretations and expectations on narratives and records. Such ideological tendencies in rewriting history, sometimes in a revisionist manner, are not new. Its limits as a method have been critically and persuasively exposed by De Heusch (1972) who, in reference to Central Africa, disparaged a hidden, linear and evolutionary history of the region. In the same way, other authors have convincingly demonstrated the ideological bias produced through the selection of historical and circumstantial events by those 'who write the story' against those 'who make the story' and those 'who experience the story' (Hahonou & Pelckmans 2012). Returning to Southeast Asia, how is it that the terms 'borderlands' and 'marginalization' came to be *de facto* bound together in the absence of written and oral history transmitted among the local people? Did the appearance of these terms foreshadow a destiny in the making? Or does it reflect a kind of curse prevailing under this implicit, binomial logic? Or, alternatively, were these terms nothing more than a partial leitmotif, with roots in a discourse entertained by the conventional state/centre analysis, recorded in detailed official histories

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that failed to address those 'forgotten people' residing in the 'inaccessible peripheries'?

Based on a combination of ethnography and theory, an anthropological scepticism – successively revealed elsewhere in Southeast Asia by Michaud (2010), Turton (2000), McKinnon (1997) and Leach (1960) – was growing against the binary classification of the centre and periphery commonly adopted in most scholarly studies and in scientific debates as an everlasting and implicit dynamic, entertained and revitalized by the concepts of power, hierarchy and domination.

Having spent extensive periods in Cambodia from 1994 to 2013, I bore witness to some of the social transformations occurring in a few remote parts of the country, specifically (but not exclusively) in the Northeastern region, a location inhabited by 'hill peoples'. In these places, government workers, developers and newly arrived social scientists have been continuously, with a few exceptions, commenting that local populations residing near the undulating borders are, more than other groups, facing the 'threat' of growing exclusion, not only because of their location near the Vietnamese and Lao borders, but because of their socio-cultural marginalization and, lastly, because they are perceived as vulnerable ethnic groups with increasingly weakened identities. Put simply, an 'inner' spiritual and material wealth, one that could offer an unidentified intrinsic component of a strong ethnic identity, is missing.

Although some of these statements do deserve careful attention and should not be immediately dismissed, they cannot be systematically taken for granted. This is so given that the bizarre implications of repeated socio-cultural discriminations and structural violence associated with ethnic contempt have been vigilantly addressed by Wijeyewardene (1990) in his studies of the diverse aspects of several 'trans-national' ethnic groups in adjacent areas of Southwest China and by Ovesen (1995) when he analyzes the laborious integration attempts of the Hmong in Laos. Most of all, a deliberated suspicious scientific approach needs to scrutinize the aberration of the concept of 'identity deprivation', a phenomenon which is supposed to be the inevitable outcome of geographical and political marginalization. Identity deprivation is a forged concept that results in an artificial kind of 'cultural absenteeism', designed by administrators and approved by policy makers. These rough categorizations and linear associations entertain a misleading reductionism which is liable to provide artificial tools resulting in the elaboration of false referential identities from perspectives that remain external to the social groups they refer to. Such an asymmetric attitude has been worsened by the typical and ongoing governmental

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involvement in projects of ethnic cataloguing, a pernicious administrative and political process which has been extensively highlighted in Vietnam by Keyes (1984). With the same conviction, Ito's research in the northern part of the same country reveals that ethnic differences among the Tay and the Nung people are less caused by some hypothetical primordial culture than by economic and migratory factors (Ito 2000: 52). Based on a historical account of these populations, she comes to the conclusion that the concept of ethnicity differentiation, which was created by those on the top of the ruling structures, is nowadays deliberately strengthened and manipulated by the sole political party acting as the exclusive national authority (*op. cit.*: 52). A similar ethnic taxonomy has already been implemented for some time in Laos, and is nowadays *en vogue* in Cambodia. This static classification fails to consider these ethnic groups' innovative capacity to deal with new political, cultural and socio-economic situations. It avoids showing their aptitude to develop tactics[1] for modifying their name, their affiliation and their story, and it does not allow one to see anymore their incredible strength for adjusting their cultural background in a changing environment. Lastly, it ruins the recognition of their ability to navigate in a huge social network extending far beyond their own ethnicity in a vast borderland context.

These dogmatic propositions, rendered as implicit precepts in dominant political discourse, can be challenged. I would like to demonstrate the endemic reality of the cultural creativity and specificity of hill peoples in the context of intensified encounters. I argue that the increasing complexity of these exchanges is not influential in the loss of so-called 'authentic identities and cultures' but, on the contrary, is contributing to the continuous reconstruction of flexible identities, comprehended as a continuum, in a Cambodian territory sharing a greater number of physical and social relations 'within' and with Laos and Vietnam. However, I am not attempting to draw any universal generalizations. I merely rely on social processes gathered from my personal research and my long-term observations, which started in 1994 in Ratanakiri province, and that are supported by secondary

1 In this chapter, I employ de Certeau's (1984) distinctions between strategies and tactics. Strategies refer to the weapon of the 'strong' by which those who are based in their own proper place (state, territories, legal institutions) manipulate power at will. Strategies can be implemented in various ways such as demarcation, classification and regulation. In contrast, tactics are the weapon of the 'weak' and are characterized by furtive movements practiced in every day life by those who are 'caught in the nets of discipline' in a place of the other. Tactics are ways of operation of everyday practices through which the weak contest the spatial domination by the strong (Cresswell 1997: 362-363).

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data. The essential part of my fieldwork was initially done (and is still going on in the present) among the Tampuan living in the central plateau; a second part of the investigations took place in villages located nearby the Sésan River in the northern part of the province (some of the villages include people from different ethnic origin, others do not); a third part of the ethnographic work was recently conducted in some villages nearby the Vietnamese border where Jarai and Cham people are coexisting. These three instances are perhaps not representative of the overall situation but they are illustrative of prevailing social dynamics at the regional level.

In the beginning, I proposed to use the matter of health as a starting point in my appreciation of the extent of identity recomposition in the Thai-Cambodian borderlands. I wanted to use the idea of 'border illness' to show that culture can be embodied through medical symptoms as social markers in a context where such identities can be otherwise threatened. Such an analysis was eloquently proposed and demonstrated by French anthropologist Jean Chapuis (2001) in the late 1990s in his study of the Amerindian Wayana living in French Guyana and Surinam. I nonetheless decided to change the angle from which to approach this issue in spite of preliminary field research undertaken on this fascinating topic. I do not aim to reject the former hypothesis nor do I think it is unjustified to explore a reformulated distinctiveness through this type of approach. But due to ongoing political and social frictions in my selected geographical locations in 2009/2010 in a western Cambodian province, it became difficult to complete the health ethnographic investigations[2]. I therefore made the decision to return to a more familiar place, located three hundred kilometres to the northeast. The difference in my current project is a move from my previous focus on health to a new focus on the evolution of socio-cultural exchanges taking place in another borderland area.

## Irremediable Interferences

Borderlands, as they are commonly understood, are the recent creations of state administrative practices. Political boundaries in Cambodia were shaped and ratified under French colonial rule. Boundary fluctuations have been taking place over the last two centuries (Aymonier 2003, Lafont 1989) and have been the cause of highly sensitive disputes with Thailand

2 Political troubles started with the Preah Vihear temple which location has been for long contested by Thailand and Cambodia.

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**Map 2.1 Ratanakiri Province**

since 2008. As for the pre-colonial period, without any available written records or oral histories, nobody has been able so far to accurately map how and under which circumstances hill peoples settled in the hinterland, between the Sésan and Srépok Rivers, and in the highlands, trapped between two neighbouring countries to the north and the east (respectively, Laos and Vietnam). With the use of archives, more documents from the colonial period are available. A recent study reveals for instance that the ethnic Jarai were neither passive nor submissive during the colonial period. They were either established in Vietnam or in Cambodia once the previous

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hinterland became administratively demarcated (Guérin & Padwe 2011). The Jarai knew how to take advantage of the French administration and many of them had been in a position to by-pass the official decisions and to impose their willpower by refusing the Western conceptions of homogeneity and social and political cohesions which were blindly associated for each ethno-linguistic group. They prefered the maintenance of the village as the highest political unit, referring to the three Pötao[3] religious leaders as the emblematic representatives of the Jarai identity and maintaining the seven matrimonial clans as the structural organizational components of the micro-society established at the village level (*op. cit.* 2011: 269).

This hilly territory, currently located in the province of Ratanakiri, has been caught between three kingdoms: to the south and west reigned a powerful Khmer monarchy with Angkor as its centre until the 15th century, to the east were the Cham (later supplanted by the Kinh in contemporary Vietnam) and to the north was the Lao dynasty from Champasak, an alleged vassalage of the Siamese emperor that thrived until the 19th century. Contrary to the archives of neighbouring countries like China, Myanmar and Thailand, old royal records and pre-colonial administrative archives remain generally silent on hill peoples and their territories. The first Khmer treatise, called Krâm Téasa Kammakâr, written before the 17th century, mentions the existence of highlanders in the northeast as a potential source of slaves, but offers no further details (Condominas 1998). So far, any attempt to investigate further into the past, even to just before the 20th century, has resulted in failure. Neither archaeological artefacts nor epigraphy and inscriptions (except a bas-relief in the Angkor complex which some authors claim depicts 'Montagnards' with their dresses, weapons and physical features) have been able to provide substantial reliable information on non-Khmer people in their home territories. It does not mean that any information is definitely lost, but innovative methodologies, under the auspices of a real interdisciplinary approach and with the goal of increasing the knowledge of the past[4], are still waiting to be developed.

We have only recent documents written by missionaries, explorers, members of the military and local administrators[5], whose testimonies, with the notable exception of Adhémard Leclère and Etienne Aymonier (Leclère

3 For the Potaö, see Dournes's excellent book (1977).

4 A French research team composed of demographers, population geneticists, statisticians, anthropologists and linguists have just started a program dealing with, among other priorities, a multi-linear socio-genetic approach of the history of the highlanders in Ratanakiri and Mondulkiri provinces (Cambodia) and in other locations in the northern part of Laos.

5 Among others: Maître 1912, Baudesson 1997, Carné 2000, Cupet 1998 and Mouhot 2000.

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1908, Aymonier 1900), reflect geopolitical expansionist views sustained by their own ideological assignments rather than by objective attempts to understand the roots and the destinies of the hill peoples themselves. Apart from a small number of ethno-historical studies undertaken in Laos by Goudineau (2000) and Baird (2010), in Cambodia mostly by Guérin (2008) and to some extent by Bourdier (1997, 1998b), and in contrast with the neighbouring high plateaus of Vietnam which have been studiously explored by Boulbet (1967), Hickey (1982a, 1982b), Michaud (2000) and Salemink (2000, 2003), very little is known about the cultural constitution of the past in Cambodian borderlands. There have been alternative attempts, spurred by scientific curiosity, to describe minority groups as Proto-Indochinese populations but they remain anecdotic. However, in addition to the essential reference book *Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia* (Lebar, Hickey & Musgrave 1964), we must be grateful to the French missionary Emile Kemlin, who was last published in 1998, and to the scientific precursor Albert-Marie Maurice who carried out a patient ethnographic study on the Bunong in Mondulkiri province (2002a, 2002b). Some well-known French anthropologists like Condominas (1957, 1977), who lived with the Mnong Gar between 1948 and 1949, and Dournes (1955, 1972), who spent more than fifteen years with the Jarai, have not been working on borderlands *per se*, yet they managed to transform the conventional ethnocentric view by adopting a long-term and diligent ethnographic methodological approach for the study of indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, the dominant approach in the 19$^{th}$ and first half of the 20$^{th}$ century remained a schematic depiction of hill peoples that insisted on their superstition and backwardness in order to justify pacification, as has been accurately highlighted in Guérin's work (2008). In spite of the estimated value of all these studies, I am of the same opinion of Horstmann (2006), who comes to the conclusion 'that most of the current studies have the tendency to focus their scholarship on marginal peripheries as Southeast Asian states by considering local communities with clearly inscribed identities without insisting sufficiently on identity formation'.

I would dare to maintain that if the majority of the early theories appear to be out-dated, this does not mean that these historical testimonies addressing Hill Tribes are not worthy of further investigation. Even explorers' accounts deserve attention as the first recorded testimonies, in spite of the bias of their conclusions, the naivety of their descriptions and the incoherence of their methodology, which, after all, did not serve to promote objective academic knowledge but to explore the feasibility of French hegemony in Indochina. These are the sole texts of this period that can supply the reader

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with vivid first-hand observations. Some of them dedicated a part of their professional lives to highlanders. Baudesson (1997), a French civil servant who was initially in charge of preparing land for the construction of the Vietnam-China railway at the beginning of the 20th century, spent many years trying to understand indigenous modes of life while acting as a medical doctor. His devotion towards the highlanders was sincere and he was held in high esteem in some of the places he went to. Mouhot (2000) and Maître (1912), among others, died during their unrelenting missions. In spite of the incredible merit they showed (travelling back then was not easy) and apart from the paucity of second-hand materials on their missions, their books and reports have to be read with critical scrutiny insofar as they do not indulge in conveying any details of the historical contexts of this confined territory.

So far, no archaeological, historical and linguistic overviews of the close territories in the neighbouring countries provide complementary information. New information may emerge at some point if relevant material is unearthed in sporadic archaeological missions, soon to be initiated in the Northeast of Cambodia. Because of this imposed historical myopia, we can only infer, presume, launch hypotheses or propose theories in the same way that James C. Scott (2009) did extensively in his book. In that respect, I propose to discern two sources of information: the first is rooted in ethnographic perspectives[6], while the second, in spite of the audacity of the proposed ideas, remains conjectural statements[7].

I will now examine the data that has emerged from ethnographic accounts. Firstly, 'hill people' have not always been native to the hills. Exodus and smaller migrations regularly occurred and the intricacy of spatial movements makes new arrivals converge or live apart from other groups. Such displacements have so far not been documented and thus nobody is clear on how and why they occurred. However, I am certain that these processes did and still do take place (as I will show below). Vernacular mythologies and oral literatures in Ratanakiri, with the advantage of being easily manipulated and transformed, continue to support the idea of a common origin shared by all ethnic groups. The trope of 'shared origins' is extended even to those having completely different language affiliations, like the Malayo-Polynesian and the Austronesian groups. The accuracy of these statements does not matter, since they show a collective will among the people of the hills to 'recreate' a common history and a shared past

6 According to the overall definition given by Sherry Ortner (1995).

7 Rather than focusing on the huge area of Zomia, the present chapter concentrates on a much smaller hilly zone in Ratanakiri which is part of a broader Zomia.

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identity. This desire of 'being together', or stimulating close ties and associations (furtive or continuous), has to be kept in mind.

Secondly, no social unit has been completely isolated from any other, and no single group has ever tried, at least until now, to declare one's total separation from the other. On the contrary, many legends explain a common biological origin for the various local ethnic groups and the Khmers, as well as the reasons why they had to be separated and, retrospectively, how hill peoples have to be differentiated in new social units. This underlying motivation is fascinating because it explains that if human beings cannot avoid sharing common values and references, at the same time it is hazardous for all to remain together. As has been keenly underscored by Scott (2009), separation is less an act that resists togetherness than an expression in favour of strengthening emerging identities through division and avoiding rivalry, as if social and geographical dispersions were considered a major condition of survival. Until recently, the spatial socio-political configuration has reflected a fragmentation that consisted of neither territorial confederations nor ethnic federations. Before the modern administration of the province by district authorities, initiated in the 1960s, albeit with difficulty, there existed no higher social and political unit above the hamlet or village. Guérin & Padwe (2011) have also noticed the same feature during their work with the Jarai, which is based on the French archives. On the other hand, processes of segmentation still occurred until recently, as I have been able to identify in the mid-1990s villages that had recently, or were just about to, split up among the Jarai, the Tampuan and the Brao.

Thirdly, ethnolinguistic investigations, eventually supported by ethnohistorical evidences, could reinforce the assumption that every social unit that moved to the hills took another name and incorporated other languages, either by force or by constraint (even if most of them, at least the men, are polyglots). One of the most reputed historians of Cambodia has noted that, 'given the variability and shifting of ethnic designations, which is now common place in Southeast Asian anthropology, it requires great daring to propose any identity between a modern ethnonym, particularly the popular designation of one group by its neighbours, with a term which may have been an ethnonym, but again may not, in the [past centuries]' (Vickery 1998: 67). A modern example is the Krüng, a recent ethnic designation. Three generations ago, they were called the Brao, but then some of them became resolute, for some historical and circumstantial reasons that cannot be discussed here, to be recognized as Krüng[8]. Today, more than 5,000 people

8 Discussion with Ian Baird, when he was doing his doctorate fieldwork on the Brao people.

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claim to be identified as Krüng. The new name is not only an emblem, but also a symbolic marker, in reference to Barth's influential theories on ethnic groups and boundaries (1969). It also bears a creative impulse, enhanced by local influential people, and it is associated with the motivation to put together systems of knowledge, practice and representation that become, over the course of time, a specific cultural pattern they no longer share with those who remain Brao.

Besides, interesting examples associated with recent ongoing attempts of social reunification can be found in the remote hills of Andong Meas district located in the vicinity of the Vietnamese border. Here, some in-migrants make tremendous efforts to negotiate their vulnerable position into a new social and ecological environment. Their everyday practices appear to be useful tactics as well as spatial practices that can be illustrated in different aspects. One of their particularities is related to the maintenance of the names. During the last decade, ethnic Cham families started migrating and settling in Jarai villages[9]. When arriving, in spite of using the mutual names of Jarai and Cham as markers of cultural differentiation, they revisited the past and re-actualized, with new discourses, alleged lost elements of a common mythology expressing their common origin, which, according to the Cham, needed to be strengthened after ten centuries of physical separation. There was no attempt to propose a generic name after arrival: each particular ethnonym was considered as something superficial, but the historical circumstances which made them dissimilar were put into perspective in order to make this differentiation evanescent, if not illusory. I will come back later on in the text to the fascinating encounter between these two social units, which took place through other everyday practices.

This cultural pattern associated with names is, of course, socially constructed, but it simultaneously reflects an incorporation process, in the sense given by Foucault (1969), a profound reality lending existence to the essence of what is called culture: a production and collection of thousands of small details, accounts and local histories that makes a group of people willing to live together. In other instances, and contrary to what happened between the Cham and the Jarai, changing a name or recalling a previous name can be an ethnic claim, a process of 'other construction' and hierarchy production. This occurred in a few villages near the provincial capital Banlung, where some people no longer call themselves Tampuan, but Khmer or Khmer Loeu. Interestingly, this was mostly under the initiative

9 Most Cham from Cambodia come from the actual territory of central Vietnam, where they used to live before taking refuge in Cambodia when the Cham empire collapsed.

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of social elites wanting to distance themselves from others with the same name. Of course, the name was not the only thing that changed; the adopted ethnonym was a vehicle to increase the visibility of social and cultural demarcation.

Fourthly, studies have started investigating the historicity of interethnic relations in Ratanakiri (White 2009, Bourdier 2006). Their preliminary results show that these encounters are not simply dialectical relationships between the peoples of the plains and the peoples of the hills, but also among the latter group itself. At present, this phenomenon is increasingly common and, as this essay attempts to demonstrate, newly encountered social dynamics occurring at the village level provide complementary possibilities to adjust and create new ways of 'being together', even beyond and between borders. Let me come back to the Cham's progressive arrival in the Jarai villages. The adopted tactic follows a similar pattern: at first a family, generally coming directly from the valley or from the provincial capital of Ratanakiri, asks for permission to settle in the village to open a petty grocery shop, thereby creating commercial supplies and commodities that did not exist before. They deliberately espouse a low profile and try their best to respond to the expectations of the Jarai without showing any attempt for making immediate material profits. They do not want to be considered as pure traders willing to indiscriminately generate good income; they prefer introducing themselves as mediators or servants of the farmers. They barter, exchange and lend. The Jarai borrow without credit and are not forced to repay in cash. The objective of the humble attitude is to be accepted within the community but also to prepare and facilitate the arrival of other Cham families. In the meantime, the couple with the grocery manages to find an available portion of land (with the approval of the local leaders) at starting swidden cultivation, in the same way the Jarai are cultivating. In addition, they develop a small cashew nuts plantation and encourage the Jarai to increase the yield of theirs, based on the idea that other Cham families may come, willing to exchange their know-how, not only in term of production but for improving their marketing system, which so far remains weak on these highlands in the absence of acceptable roads and transportation facilities. That is how, generally after one year, more Cham families[10] are expected and, most of the time, welcome to settle in the village, with the guarantee to get some available land at a reasonable price. Efforts of conscientious combination are visible. For instance, Cham

10 According to the places we had been in 2010, it can vary from ten to forty nuclear families in a single village.

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are Muslim (a few are converted Christians) but they are not proselyte at the village level. They attend local ceremonies and sacrifices when they are invited, and they share food and sometimes drink with the Jarai. Moreover, as far as I came to know during my last visit in 2011, there is no systematic impediment for intermarriage contrary to what usually occurs elsewhere in Cambodia. These tactical interactions are not without ambivalence and if a few Jarai feel resentful about the insidious invasion of the Cham, it remains whispered and rarely disputed openly. A critical attitude against the Cham (that could be expected) is far from being universally shared, and is found mostly in remote places where the Jarai have (so far) sufficient land and recognize the pugnacity of the migrants, their open-mindedness, their capacity to adjust in a difficult natural environment and, most of all, their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge coming from the rest of the country. New stories are penetrating the village and original ideas shared by the Jarai and the Cham are germinating.

Fifthly, various identities are being definitively transformed and enriched and are still in the process of changing. At present, this is taking place more rapidly. After having observed interethnic relations in Ratanakiri province over a generous period of time, I agree with James Scott that ethnic identities are more a matter of performance than of genealogy. For most people living in hilly regions nowadays, ethnicity is a positional approach and is also a way to remember ethnic identities by promoting new symbolic meanings.

This is what the Cham are doing with their Jarai counterparts when they create new legends telling about their common origin when they were a single united population in the Champa kingdom who came to be separated after the invasion of the Kinh. This is also what the Kachak (from a village in Veunsai district) are doing by coexisting with Brao, Krüng and Tampuan families. In this instance, each member of the village has the right to maintain some of his cultural specificities (taboos, rituals, mythology, language, etc.) according to his ethnic background, but there is clear encouragement for everybody to be part of the same community by adopting the clan system (which does not exist among the Brao and the Krüng), by exchanging, learning and imitating daily codes of living together, and by sharing the same dominant language which is the Kachak language.

This is, again, what happens with the administrative change in local governance. In fact, if traditional authorities do not supervise with customary practice because the Khmer state authorities are strongly interfering at the local level (the village), it does not mean that highlanders remain passive and accept every order and each project from the top. This new interference has of course created ambivalent resentments and abuses, but the majority

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of the village representatives continue, with more or less intensity and according to the localities, to deal with local issues by themselves, to resolve minor conflicts and to ask the services of some uncontested traditional leaders who know about the traditions, the religious cosmology and, most of all, can communicate with the parallel world of invisible supernatural beings. This new social assemblage, made by putting together those who are supposed to transmit the information and recommendations from the provincial power to the other villagers and those who are authorised to enter in contact with the spirits residing in the natural environment, promote new intellectual stimulations that in turn allow the villagers to be aware of various options. There is no clear opposition but multiplication of choices. As I used to hear so many times in Ratanakiri, villagers (men and women) are nowadays aware that there is not a single way of doing and thinking. Some express their relief of being liberated by the pressure of some of their traditions, which forced their ancestors to respect scrupulously strict internal rules. Far from being an acculturation process, and far from what has been assumed as 'an irremediable loss' by nostalgic individuals willing to keep the ethnic minorities in a museum, change in the local governance can be, if properly and adequately implemented (but it is unfortunately not the case everywhere), a constructive platform of exchange liable to stimulate new ideas that will help broaden the life orientations of the coming generations.

Places of encounters have therefore to be considered as *porous border*s for the reason that their social and spatial landscapes are characterized by powerful identity effervescences. But the complexity of this effervescence is permanently in construction, never achieved and always fragile when there are irremediable occurrences of new events, sometimes unpredictable, that interfere in a sustainable way into the day-to-day life of the people. It may lead to turmoil as has already occurred in the province with an increasing amount of dispossessed villagers who lose most of their land. Some villagers I met in 2012 sadly explain this new state as 'drying up like the rice without water', 'having nothing more to share with others' and 'feeling empty'. This is also what happens with young people who start using chemical drugs, deserting their village and wandering in a state of social anomie.

Except for these extreme cases, it is not a paradox to argue that identity can also be defined as a constructive difference. If a Tampuan is eager to be called Tampuan and not Khmer, it would mean that the name carries essential values that cannot be neglected. Based on my personal ethnographic experience, narrowing our questioning to ethno-fiction goes sometimes against these people's efforts to identify themselves with something that cannot be seen as devoid of meaning. In fact, this so-called fiction

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(excluding the ethnonyms imposed by the state) becomes a reality, and so when you ask a Krüng if his ancestors were Brao, he will strongly deny this assertion because such a revelation would go against what he has been patiently and recently re-constructing, including the legacy of his past. This is a very important point because it means that an anthropologist has to consider, at least in this particular instance of self-designation, how relationships are prioritized before looking at any particularity related to ethnic identity. Furthermore it makes little sense, except for the linguist who has other objectives in mind for deciphering a language, to juxtapose linguistic families since these are more and more interrelated and rarely isolated. So what should we take into account? Some authors intend to demonstrate that 'what is meaningful is the social coherency of a social landscape produced by the interactions of its actors' (Robinne 2011). Perhaps this is valid in the particular Burmese setting to which Robinne refers. But identity cannot always, and everywhere, be reduced to the social relations entertained with others. Culture is not merely defined by confrontation. This interrelation is a necessary indicator, but definitely not sufficient alone. There is something 'deeper', which is culturally engraved in the social body. And this is what allows the people to 'display themselves' before differentiating themselves from the *other*.

On the other hand, there are conjunctures. Firstly, it is difficult to assert that, over the last centuries in Cambodia, ethnic groups were always either within the state and oppressed, or outside of it and free. Perhaps some groups belonged to former literate civilizations and lost the written language, as is mentioned in the oral literature among many ethnic groups (like the Kachak, Jarai and the Tampuan). But if this were to be the case, it was perhaps a constraint and consequence of their living conditions. In short, this was a process that was not deliberate. In that respect, it is possible that the maintenance of an oral tradition was an original act of freedom, but it could also be more of a consequence of division, a safeguard arising from social segmentation rather than an underlying reason for separation.

Finally, with the limited materials I have compiled, I am not certain that the occupation of hilly regions was used as a method of escape from the tyranny of the padi state run by neighbouring valley kingdoms. If this had been the case, they placed themselves in a somewhat worse situation since they had to face another type of tyranny in the mountain village. This new sociological setting, as far as I have noticed from 1994 onwards and as far as the first travellers could observe, and beyond any exotic appearances, is not as egalitarian and acephalous as commonly thought. An internal hierarchy prevails between different lineages or clans, among

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men and women, with religious leadership as a constant influence. Ortner (1995) has already emphasized this inclination to 'sanitize politics', which often entails focusing exclusively on relations between the dominated and the dominating while glossing over other contradictions and conflicts (Grandin 2001). However, there are reasons – about which the literature on Ratanakiri and its borderlands still remains silent – that must have encouraged people to move there at some point in the past. Even if we need to be aware of possible future developments in scholarship that could, even partially, reveal these reasons and causes, we can still rely on a few current discoveries. Historical and linguistic parallels make us aware, for instance, that the Jarai, who were initially people assimilated to the Cham of the Central Valley of Vietnam, separated from them about one thousand years ago and moved to hills to the east, finally reaching Northern Cambodia (a historical account which is, as we have mentioned before, re-appropriated by the Cham nowadays). In another instance, the Kachak language has nothing to do with the neighbouring spoken languages and the linguist Gerald Diffloth presumes a common linguistic origin with other ethnic groups nowadays located in North Vietnam[11]. Besides this similarity, no possible migration and no historical account can testify and accompany the linguistic hypothesis.

Over time, indigenous groups began to conduct swidden agriculture, reinforced matrilineal practices and developed a clan system. This social organization among the Jarai has been depicted elsewhere (Dournes 1977, Condominas 1977) and there is no need to come back to it, even if changes have occurred with less prescribed marriages and more alliances and inter-marriages outside the village. In that respect, one hypothesis of clan origin (*pong*) among the Tampuan, and perhaps among the Jarai (by matrimonial exchange and permanent contact), may come from *pon*, the initial titles held by high-ranking persons during the pre-Angkor and Angkor period, as mentioned in numerous Khmer inscriptions (Vickery 1998: 83-138). The epithet *pon* could have 'travelled' in the company of human beings; it has been kept by people who migrated progressively towards the north and settled in the high plateau regions. Once they had made it to their destination, a man (rarely a woman, according to oral testimonies) who created a particular settlement 'gave' his name to the village and transferred the title he brought with him to all his descendants. What was an antique title, but still preserved, became an exogamous clan. This very hypothetical assumption, which nevertheless deserves attention for further investigation,

11 Personal communication, January 2011.

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enters in apparent conflict with the origins of the clans as they have been narrated in Jarai mythologies (Dournes 1972) and Tampuan mythologies. But this does not imply the existence of an explicit contradiction in reality, since myths do not intend to rewrite the past but, as evinced in Sahlins' work (1980), aim to legitimize the present.

## International Linkages, Newcomers and Alternative Perspectives

Wherever conflicts and contradictions occur or have occurred, hill peoples have been forced to negotiate with this succession of events, and have no other choice than being involved in various social, ecological, political and cultural adjustments. Taking a look in the Cambodian press during the last decade is already sufficient to have an idea about the multitude of challenges they faced and how they have been able, with perseverance, to overcome some of them (land encroachment, logging, human rights abuses, administrative exhortation, misleading development interventions, etc.). This series of repeated adjustments demonstrates a certain capacity to follow, and also to create, innovate and reconsider the options suitable for their particular context. As a consequence, this shows the existence of flexible identities.

Yet, the first steps of what can be called a 'prehistoric micro-globalization', resulting both from local and more distant encounters, are not novel and have been taking place over long periods of time. It is worth remembering that hill populations have never been sedentary, and even if they can hardly be called 'nomadic' because of their involvement in swidden agriculture, they do have flexible social organizations and non-permanent attachments to the immediate physical environment, allowing them to change locations regularly. This affords them the possibility to relocate far from the preceding settlement, to disperse themselves if the demographic situation becomes difficult to sustain (in terms of natural resource accessibility, epidemics or warfare) or, on the contrary, to mix and make alliances with isolated segments from other ethnic groups.

This convergence of agricultural and nomadic lifestyles deserves imperative attention because it suggests that there existed a historical tendency for the frequent establishment of new relations among villages and groups of people from the same (reunited) or different ethnic backgrounds. Take the case of the Tampuan living in the middle plateau of Ratanakiri. When Lao peasants from the north settled on the bank of the Sésan River, they took Tampuan and Brao women as wives, gifts valued above all others.

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They also provided tools with allied techniques for the Brao and initiated wet rice cultivation for their Tampuan in-laws. In compensation, Tampuan people transmitted myths, songs and specific know-how to the Lao farmers married to their daughters as well as to the Jarai and other groups coming from the valleys. At the same time, hill peoples (mostly Jarai, Tampuan and Bunong) would exchange buffaloes and domesticated elephants for gongs and other iron products made in present-day Vietnam. Highlanders added certain vegetables to their rice fields (*miir*) from seeds that had been provided by travellers and itinerant merchants. Traditional Khmer healers (*kru khmer*) also frequented the plateau in search of medicinal plants. At the same time, they taught Buddhist rituals to the local people and gave them amulets from the valley. Contemporary Tampuan ceremonies rely heavily on Buddhist components, and Buddhist rituals are now a part of wedding ceremonies. The bamboo craft industry has recently been revitalized with the growing number of tourists, and highlanders have been storing various products collected in the forest for sale in order to obtain new clothes and modern technologies such as motorbikes, transistors, mobile phones and televisions that are typical to Khmer communities, giving families contact with the outside word. These incessant additional components offer new cultural configurations from other social and geographical horizons and are incorporated step-by-step.

Now, let us return to the present-day situation. With regards to what has been reported in terms of local history and social interactions, a similar but more accelerated process is taking place. Since independence in the 1950s, changes occurring in the Northeastern province of Ratanakiri illustrate the way some of these so-called 'minority groups', who in fact still represented the majority of the provincial population in 2010, can no longer be considered as a number of 'closed' collective entities with individual ways of life, priorities and interests. The notion of 'community' has been seriously challenged in quite a few villages. Early Khmer colonization (organized by Prince Norodom Sihanouk in the early 1960s), followed by the horrors perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) and other interferences from the outside world by Burmese (Shan), Vietnamese, Lao, Chinese and Khmer migrants, national civil servants, investors and developers have led some of the hill peoples to take advantage of this socio-economic and cultural confrontation, while others, at the other extreme, have been left far behind.

Such heterogeneous interactions and selective connections with outsiders have various implications in terms of village life conditions, and the romantic notion of 'community' is being seriously challenged in many of

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the villages. There are vernacular expressions stipulating that 'villages have burnt', which means they have lost their social cohesion in a context of rampant fighting for land access, lineage inheritance and family income distribution. At the same time, in some hamlets included in my first case studies where I lived from 1994 to 1995 and to which I return repeatedly (nowadays, tracks[12] provide easier access to these places populated by Tampuan, Krüng, Jarai), an increasing social disparity for access to land and other commodities and for 'modern' services has taken place. This has disrupted the relatively 'peaceful' homogeneity and has dominated socio-economic life at the village level. This diffracted situation has been analyzed in a previous study (Bourdier 2008b), so I will not elaborate further on this changing situation. My intention here is to remind the reader that an escalating inequality, as a whole, is taking place first because of the national development policies and politics, and second due to massive and uncontrolled influxes of immigrants who are themselves victims of former spoliation. This is why it is worth examining evolutionary trends in light of the major development issues occurring in this area bordering Vietnam and Laos and within Ratanakiri itself, because these international programmes are stimulating interrelationships and subsequent identity reconstruction in the borderlands.

In this respect, since 2004 Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia have combined their efforts to launch the Triangle Development Program with the explicit purpose to encourage both public and private economic investments in the region partially examined in this essay: Southern Laos, Northeastern Cambodia and the Central Highlands of Vietnam (Government of Vietnam, 2004). More precisely, a *Lao Bao* Special Economic and Commercial Area (SECA) is encouraging faster economic development with the introduction of special economic and industrial zones that can facilitate intra-regional, inter-regional and international trading. The prominent effort of Vietnam to boost socio-economic development is particularly effective in the north-eastern part of Cambodia. At the local level in Ratanakiri province, this initiative is the continuation of a state-building territorial organization, which, according to national policymakers, is still lacking at this point due to poor administration in the remote region that has been recently designated with the label of 'tribal belt'.

Nowadays, this process of state-building is associated with the internationalization of a huge portion of Cambodia's territory, by means of intensive land concessions to foreign companies and private national investors. At the

12 Ten years ago, they could only be reached by footpaths.

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moment, Ratanakiri province, due to its central key position and its fertile lands, is one of the most targeted areas for foreign investment. The national ministries in charge of the Triangle Development Program deliberately opted not to negotiate with the hill populations by implementing a top-down approach. They initiated this unilateral relationship openly, with the media (including a press looking for justification) and with various observers. Without going into details, it implies a strict control of the movements of the hill peoples at the national level[13] and a threat to the continuance of their traditional ways of subsistence, characterized by swidden agriculture and the collection of forest products. The links between social organization and choice of cultivation are being challenged. Cash crops are encouraged and the first consequence of the introduction of these new cultivars (such as rubber, cassava, cashew and groundnut) is the imposition of command upon the local populations chosen for production and harvesting activities on government-owned firms, private medium enterprises and external agencies. More than ever, hill peoples are at the epicentre of drastic new social and geopolitical economic deals they cannot control anymore.

Does this mean that these new systems of capitalist control heralded by the thorny notion called 'economic development' cannot be disputed by anyone? Not at all. In the front line, quite a few Jarai villages, engaged in regular contact and exchange with their relatives living on the other side of the border, are aware of what has happened in terms of land despoliation with the waves of Kinh migration and the restructuring of the landscape planned by the Hanoi government. Access to information by travelling and by the use of modern media and new technologies (mobile phone, recorder, video, photo camera) has been the prerequisite for enacting change in these types of situations. In that respect, similar concerns are emerging, followed by a new awareness of the occurrence of analogous circumstances elsewhere. Though not everywhere, not uniformly, not with the same intensity and not with the same conviction, a socio-political trend is definitely occurring in some places. And these locations can be sources of inspirations for others.

Various tactics, some of which are contradictory, are taking place. Some inhabitants do not question this international intrusion, implemented in the name of development, and even make the effort to take advantage of it by promoting the cultural and natural heritage of their village and its surroundings to develop ecotourism. A few Tampuan, Kaveth and Brao villages

13 They need 'special authorizations' to leave their province, under the pretext of the government decision to take care of their security.

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are involved in this quest for exoticism. However, no group is willing to completely expose cultural secrets, leading some to abandon this solution.

Other villagers are deciding to take advantage of new agricultural inputs insofar as it is not totally incompatible with their way of life and social organization. The problem is that there is no room for every single nuclear or joint family in a given village to benefit from these new agricultural and spatial reconfigurations. In these cases, villagers are no longer equal and the notion of 'being together' fades away and is replaced by an anticipated economic segmentation and increased individuality. Villages located nearby the provincial capital and those affected by economic land concessions are the most vulnerable.

Another tactic[14] consists in collecting and acting on information via independent media, NGOs and local leaders. This new attitude aims to reassemble society, to enhance social links and to develop new networks encompassing groups of persons, families, residential units, hamlets and villages that realize that they share common problems. This is one of the innovations occurring in this time of modernization and globalization: for the first time, a growing and sustainable solidarity beyond the limits of the village is emerging. Technological tools, such as the mobile phone with an extensive coverage in the most remote forest, and new transportation services facilitate such social mobilizations. These tools can broadcast and expand local social movements (previously existent but invisible on a wider scale) to the capital Phnom Penh and beyond national borders. Ideas are germinating, supported by a modern technology that allows hill peoples from Ratanakiri to be in a position to communicate and exchange with the outside world. In that respect, this exterior world is penetrating theirs, becoming a place where they hope to find understanding, support, strength and new ideas (including the knowledge used to resist national dictates). Such a new and complex system of interaction takes an important place in the present-day life of hill peoples. This also gives local villagers social and political visibility, something that was sorely missing ten years ago. Some of their representatives are becoming confident that, from now on, there will be someone ready to listen to them, if not within the government, then at least within the complicated jungle of development agencies. Support may also be found through another 'magical tool' for communication, as some of the elders call 'technology'.

Perhaps these new interferences explain partly why there is not, at least up until now, a single trace of pan-ethnic charismatic movements,

14 I will not pass them all in review.

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nor is there any visible prophetism[15]. New and modern alternatives act as substitutes. Even though a certain kind of animism still prevails, religion is changing with the presence of Christian missionaries, but this process is embryonic and sporadic. This is not at all perceived by the hill peoples as a way to access modernity, in the same way Salemink interprets the Christian conversion among highlanders in Vietnam[16]. In the main Ratanakiri sites where it has taken place, among the Jarai near the border for instance, I remain convinced that religious conversion has been a way to create new social links among different villages and social units which were previously distant. Once they belong to the same church, it is not exceptional for the newly converted to gather for certain ceremonies, irrespective of their village of origin, and, beyond religious practices and conviction, they talk about issues other than faith and religion. This additional characteristic, already revealed by Durkheim in 1912 (Durkheim 1968), encouraging us to understand religious practices as a 'total fact' (according to Mauss definition), goes beyond the physical border and acts as an agent of new social and political cohesion and awareness. At another level, conversion reflects political engagement, but if we look at Vietnam as a point of comparison, this movement is extremely weak in Cambodia.

## Theoretical Prospects

All research on borderlands should nowadays distance itself from the outdated notion of stable, monotonous micro-societies and should embrace an updated perspective, initiated by Horstmann, stipulating that further investigations should be interested in 'what the border and its related order do to the people and what the people do to the border' (*op. cit*. 2006). In her interesting study on minorities and state-building in mainland Southeast Asia, Safman (2007) reminds us that the idea of nation-state first emerged as a philosophical construct in the late 18th century and only became a reality in Southeast Asia, and in the rest of the world, in the last century. But she added: 'Since that time, the notion of a unique ethnic group wedded to a specific territory has come to be the primary basis of political and social

15 Oscar Salemink has observed this among the Jarai in Vietnam (2003), but it was at a time when the political situation with regards to the Montagnards in that country was worsened after demonstrations and violent repressions in 2002.

16 Communication during the International Conference on Borderlands, Chiangmai, November 2010.

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organization' (*op. cit.* 2007: 31). The case of Cambodia occupies a rather idiosyncratic position in the panoply of minority experiences in Southeast Asia. Hill peoples enjoyed, at least once upon a time before the rule of the Khmer Rouge, 'a privileged position in the national consciousness, elevated – at least rhetorically – to a position on par with or even superior to the majority Khmer' (Ovesen & Trankell 2004). The decision in the early 1960s by Prince Norodom Sihanouk to draw the boundaries of Khmer-ness so as to include ethnic groups located both physically and culturally at the society's margin, mostly in the newly created Ratanakiri province, while excluding others like the Chinese and the Vietnamese[17], cannot be fully understood without the past's legacy.

> Ovesen & Trankell (2004) in a 'deep examination of the roots of Khmer (and non-Khmer) identity' attribute the majority's relative positive characterization of the upland minorities to the society's obsession with its historical roots in Angkor. The consequences of this reification of a (by necessity) agrarian past is a tendency to lionize those cultures based around the cultivation of (preferably) paddy and conversely, a suspicion of those engaged in commerce and other urban-centred enterprises (quoted by Safman, *op. cit.* 2007).

This new ideology, reinforced in its extreme aberration by the Khmer Rouge, was nevertheless pointing out some important indigenous cultural traits that could be used, at least at that time, for the modern foundation of the nation-state.

In that respect, I sometimes regret that James Scott, among others, gives us a vision of a 'lost culture' (Scott 2009). Does this mean that, after World War II, nothing interesting has been happening in the highlands[18], or does this mean the concept of Zomia cannot be defended in the new worldwide geopolitical environment? I do not think so; he is encouraging other scientists to go ahead. He is probably inciting his readers to decide for themselves how the general situation he mentions in his book is going

17 Safman continues with the Khmer Rouge ideology by saying, 'By contrast to the experiences of the Chinese and Vietnamese minorities, the majority Khmers rural bias worked overwhelmingly to the advantage of the upland groups who "represented the Khmer ideal of purity because they were the least contaminated by foreign influences" (Ovesen & Tankell 2004: 248). So, ironically, the very technological "backwardness" and isolation, which in other contexts has made upland peoples the target of ridicule and exclusion, worked to their political benefit' (*op. cit.* 2007), at least for a while in recent Cambodian history.

18 As anthropologist Jonsson quoted in August 2010 in an internet forum.

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on in particular locations of the Asiatic region. The short presentation of the Khmer-ness shows that Ratanakiri province, previously a Zomia according to Scott's definition, (*op. cit.*, 2009), turns out to be a socially and geographically intricate place, an inner Zomia 'within the state', with various social ramifications inside but still a location that has inherited most of the Zomia characteristics. We gave illustrations in this essay about the increasing encounters of ethnic groups in the borderland who in spite of having dissimilar socio-economic backgrounds try to find possible ways of 'being together', leading to new cultural effervescences. But does it mean that little is left from the past, besides survivals kept for tourist attractions? Not at all.

We all know, for instance, that culture is a continuum, but many theories of development have long continued to share the idea of cultural tragedy associated with the necessary disintegration of minor societies as a precondition for modern economic expansion. However, this domination by external forces has neglected or ignored peoples' efforts to survive economically, but also culturally. Besides, the notion of borderlands has been almost entirely neglected. Alternative theories have lately re-centralized the necessity of taking into account the responses of local societies, by sometimes including the question of physical borderlands, but the emphasis has been given to demonstrations of resistance liable to highlight the capacity of minor cultures – frequently perceived as homogenous, not as porous borders – to negotiate and contest certain perceivably unwanted effects of globalization.

My observations in Southeast Asia, mostly, but not solely, in Cambodia, tend to show that it is not simply the case that some minor societies have persisted in spite of free-market orientations or because the people have resisted the imposition of new economic systems. This is not so much the culture of resistance as it is the resistance of culture. And the porosity of a culture, allowing new social assemblages of people to join together by challenging the authoritarian administrative definition of border, is one of the main conditions for promoting the resistance of culture. In fact, every culture needs to change relentlessly in order to survive and (physical and symbolical) abolition of borders is a prerequisite not only for surviving but creating. Cambodia has experienced one of the worst moments in the history of the world with the ideas of purity, isolation and autonomy towards the outside world during the Khmer Rouge regime (Kierman 1996). Change is a condition of permanence and with this understanding one of the future research imperatives should be to restore to society its intrinsic dimension of creation and innovation in a context of increased encounters. All Western societies have been built through travelling, migrating, borrowing,

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exchange and imagination without disintegrating their past, and there is no reason that such process has no right to take place among the hill societies.

Based on these poorly investigated assumptions, a motivation for further research should be to discover the assorted mechanisms associated with the maintenance of cultural vivacity and creativity in a context of intensified exchanges in borderland areas. Horstmann already welcomed new studies dealing with 'the specific political ecology of individuals and states in Southeast Asia borderlands [and recalls that] exciting research is already emerging, showing how loopholes and vacuums in the largely invisible borderlands create specific border regimes characterized by hierarchies of values' (*op. cit.* 2006). Borderlands, while acting as a vector of transformation, can be privileged places to explore cultural vivacity because the sheer intensity of fluctuations acts to reveal processes that may remain hidden elsewhere. The new situation is that all these societies are more and more interconnected with the globalizing world. Nobody wants to, or can, run away into the forest to escape, as was certainly possible before. They know they can no longer take a step backward and most of the social groups are willing, albeit through lack of choice, and ready to reap some of the benefits of globalization. At the local level, this globalization, or rather 'glocalization'[19], starts commonly with the internationalization of socio-economic and cultural interactions in the borderlands.

Let me explore the topic, which may seem distinct from but is significant to this context, of the relationship between the environment and local knowledge. A growing number of Tampuan and Jarai, though I could give other examples as well, are aware that international and national bodies can no longer underestimate or downplay ecological issues[20]. Hill peoples are perhaps more conscious than Western societies that the relationship between man and nature is seriously compromised. Some values that Western societies have forgotten are still *in vogue* in their culture, and they deserve the attention of those who are ready to hear them and to promote these understandings, however contentious. Under this uncommon but existent logic, hill people use their knowledge, recently associated with a

19 Glocalization (a portmanteau of globalization and localization) is a term denoting the adaptation of a product or service specifically to each locality or culture in which it is sold. It is similar to internationalization. The term glocalization is a newly coined blend of globalization and localization refers to a concept to describe individuals, groups, organizations, products or services that reflect not only a global standard but also a local one (Extracts from Wikipedia encyclopedia).

20 This occurred specifically at the dawn of the third millennium with more and more alarming voices advocating for the future of the planet.

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new environmental awareness and strengthened and updated by developers, human rights officers and conservationists, as a tool to protect their land from outsiders and multinational corporations. Of course, competition is extremely unbalanced, but they do try, and this attempt demonstrates a significant change.

## Conclusion: the return of nomadic life

Whatever the result of these processes, both internal and borderland dynamics that allow for the reproduction of society need to be anthropologically deciphered so that we can understand the conditions under which a given culture maintains its peculiarities. This may mean borrowing, adopting or refusing options from others, or it may involve incorporating information received from the outside. Of course, there may be some points of rupture, as has already taken place in other countries, when a given society, or a part of it, is socially (or even biologically) absorbed by a dominant culture. This is what I began to observe in certain hamlets where some families started to develop Icarian symptoms towards the invasion of the Khmers, and this is also what Padwe (2012) depicted among the Jarai living nearby the Vietnamese border with the rapid changes associated with agro-industry, rampant deforestation and neo-liberal policies.

On the other hand, ongoing scenarios in the borderlands, specifically the formerly remote areas, deserve more attention than ever, since what was schematically called the periphery turns out to be the central point for social combinations and upheavals, economic exchanges, political decisions and cultural interactions, all of which arrive at new forms of identity. Again, it is worth mentioning that the ongoing scenarios to which I am referring in Ratanakiri are associated with new dynamics related to movement and exchange with fresh materials and technologies. People always manage to travel in different ways and by other means, physically or virtually. One may wonder whether, in the area of modernity, a new kind of virtual nomadic life is emerging. If so, this will function as an additional argument to dispute the idea that settled ways of life are a natural tendency and to show that they are, at best, a cultural and provisional option occurring at a specific period in history and succeeding by creating dominant actors and dominated actors who find new ways to resist, and nothing more.

# 3 The Burmese 'Adaptive Colonization' of Southern Thailand

*Maxime Boutry*

## Introduction

Over a number of decades, the Union of Myanmar has become one of the main sources of cheap labour for the more industrialized countries of ASEAN. For Thailand, one of the main receiving countries (along with Malaysia and Singapore), the figures concerning Burmese migrants residing in this country have risen rapidly in the last five years, from 1 million (legal and illegal Burmese migrants) to 2 million, and sometimes, according to case studies, up to an estimated 4 million (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009). One of the objectives of this paper is to understand the roots and long duration of this migration. The economic determinism used to 'justify' migrations cannot be used as the sole explanation for the great spread and dynamism of these transnational migrant networks. To understand the phenomenon of Burmese migration, we have to take into account its history, from the colonization of Southern Burma under British rule to the Burmanization[1] of the Tenasserim area (the southern border with Thailand), resulting in the 'adaptive colonization' of Southern Thailand. By 'adaptive', we mean dynamic interactions and socio-economic changes in cultural patterns.

## Historical Background: the National Roots of International Migrations

Beyond the widely accepted idea that there exists a clear economic distinction within ASEAN between poor and developed countries, with the former being sources of and the latter being destinations for economic migrants, the development of Burmese social space deserves a deeper analysis. In fact, in recent history, the Union of Myanmar has somewhat been a pioneer front

1 Lewis (1924) is one of the first authors to talk about the Burmanization of the Karen. More recently, we can cite *The Burmanization of Myanmar's Muslims* from Berlie (2008). Since the country adopted the term the 'Union of Myanmar', some authors have begun referring to 'myanmafication' (see notably Houstman 1999).

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for Burmese socio-economic developments, rather than simply representing the new name of a poor, overcrowded country. Moreover, migration patterns, cultural development and interactions in Thai society show that the Burmese are in fact one of the most flexible and mobile populations in Southeast Asia, a paradox for a country that is well known for tightly controlling its population.

These ongoing assumptions are based on the recent development of two main regions of the Union of Myanmar, namely the Irrawaddy Delta and the Tanintharyi Division.

For Myanmar, the transition between the padi state (Scott 2009) and commercial state[2] phases really began[3] with British colonization and a movement drawing the ruling power closer to the sea, to the town of Yangon (Rangoon). As a corollary of the economy-oriented policies of the British, the Irrawaddy Delta underwent a period of intense exploitation in the 19th and 20th centuries, drawing millions of Burmese from Central Myanmar to the delta, to what was still a 'rice frontier' (Adas 1974). But with the formalization of economic exploitation and its integration within the national and international economies, this so-called 'rice frontier' progressively disappeared, leaving fewer and fewer opportunities for Burmese entrepreneurs. This resulted in a return to the low pre-colonial rates of economic development and the 'frontier' finally disappeared during the second half of the 20th century.

Nonetheless, despite being integrated into the heart of the new Burmese social space, the delta partly remained a pioneer front for the development of marine fishing practices. And, further south, there remained yet another pioneer front to be conquered: the Tanintharyi region and the numerous islands of the Mergui Archipelago. Similarly to the Irrawaddy Delta during the early days of its development, the Tanintharyi Division was scarcely populated compared to Central Myanmar or to certain thalassocracies in the Malay Peninsula. Although it is located at the crossroads between continental and insular Southeast Asia, torn between the expansionist aims of the kingdoms of Siam, Burma and the Malay sultanates, and has been the site of regular plundering, the region's resources have always been relatively

2 Introduction, this volume.

3 However, Lieberman shows that, even in the precolonial period, from the time of the first conquest of Lower Burma by King Anawratha in 1057, the export-import and overseas trade sectors of the economy 'was extremely important to the emergence and maintenance of central authority, and patterns of international trade exercised a major influence on the ebb and flow of Burmese empires' (Lieberman 1987: 167).

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unexploited[4]. Tanintharyi fulfilled the role as a buffer region between the surrounding kingdoms and has, at times, been a place of exchange between the West and the East with the use of such routes as the peninsular road of Tenasserim (Hutchinson 1985).

In more recent times, the main migration of the Burmese toward the Tanintharyi Division occurred in the 1990s during a politically tense era, just after the 1988 protest and the elections of 1989. The remote archipelago was seen as a stateless area among the Burmese who were engaging in fishing activities and who greatly profited from the government-initiated development and privatization (Boutry 2007) of the fisheries sector. In this way, they participated in the government's agenda of 'Burmanizing' the region by first populating it, then by building Buddhist monasteries, pagodas and schools. This Burmanization, at a national level, followed from the felt need to reinforce the frontier between Southern Myanmar and Thailand (Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2004), in part to return the profits of marine resources to the Myanmar economy. The border between Burma (later Myanmar) and Siam (later Thailand), was drawn up by the British in the middle of the 19th century (International Boundary Study 1966), but became an administrative reality only after independence, and only really took effect once the Burmese military seized power in 1962. However, the border remained very porous even then, and population movement and economic exchange between the two countries remained fairly easy. It was not until the 1990s that a real enforcement of the administrative border took shape, increasing the economic exchanges between the two countries and inducing Myanmar's development of marine fisheries, a sector previously led by Thailand. The archipelago then became an 'economic haven' for the Burmese.

## Rationale

The details briefly illustrated above suggest that Burmese migration towards the Tanintharyi Division is undoubtedly linked to the disappearance of the 'rice frontier' in the Irrawaddy Delta, and that it is a logical continuation of the pioneering colonization of the Burmese, reproducing their society and culture on the basis of economic activities. I would even argue that this southward migration is a telltale process of transition between a padi state,

4 See Selected Correspondence of Letters issued from and received in the Office of the Commissioner, Tenasserim Division for the years 1825-26 to 1842-43, 1929.

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whose borderlands shift in tandem with its allegiances to other societies, and the commercial state of Myanmar, where new forms of hegemony are reorganized within the geographically defined borders of the state. Even if the main reasons for these internal migrations involve the occupation of new economic niches, the consequences for social and cultural evolution and the making of a Burmese social space (Condominas 1980) are much more significant. The results of migrations to Southern Thailand are also of crucial importance, and these are linked to the historical processes leading to the construction of Myanmar as a state. State ideology, political alliance, ethnicity and socio-economic patterns can be made evident through migration strategies. However, the development of cultural strategies is a matter best revealed in the borderlands.

While the territory of Zomia disappeared with the post-war emergence of the region's nation-states, borders emerged more widely as geographical lines, replacing frontier zones between 'interpenetrating political systems' (Leach 1960: 50). In the era of commercial states, borders are defined in order to separate geographic entities, forging new differences between social, cosmological, cultural, ethnic and national entities in the borderlands, even though these dimensions have traditionally overlapped. The postcolonial process of nationalization generated new spaces within these different borders, changing the character of borderlands on both sides, and thus Zomia re-emerged within the states. In order to better understand the rationale of Burmese migration toward Southern Thailand, we must consider the creation of new borders that made possible the definition of a new social space for the Burmese groups involved in the exploitation of marine resources.

Alongside the migration of Burmese to Tanintharyi's coast from Central and Lower Myanmar and the colonization of the Mergui Archipelago, we must consider the creation of two borders. The first one is the administrative, international border, which became a stake in terms of the economy for the Thai state, as its fishing industry used to exploit Tanintharyi's resources unrestrictedly. In return, the administrative border was adopted as a political tool for negotiations between Myanmar and Thailand[5] and the integration of Myanmar into ASEAN (Boutry 2007a). The reinforcement of the border also signified the integration of the Tanintharyi region into the confines of the Union of Myanmar, notably symbolized by its new function within the international economy, and defined as 'the new oil bowl

5 For instance, the Burmese government traded fishing rights against the repatriation of students who participated in the 1988 uprising.

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of Myanmar'[6]. However, these events revealed a second kind of border, a Burmese cultural border, a passage between sedentary and nomadic ways of life, bringing major changes for insular Burmese in the form of social segmentation processes (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008).

However different, these two borders are intimately linked, as the establishment of one revealed the other. Since the 1990s, the reinforcement of the administrative border (concomitant with the privatization of the fisheries sector) transformed Tenasserim and particularly the Mergui Archipelago into a pioneer front, where economic betterment was possible. Thus, many Burmese began to engage in fishing, and progressively greater numbers settled on the numerous islands of the archipelago. Gradually, the Burmese in this region transformed themselves from an agricultural society (culturally removed from any form of marine resource exploitation) into a population of fishermen. However, this socio-cultural transformation is rooted in interethnic relationships with the nomadic Moken population. The main cultural strategy of adaptation to their insular environment is what I call a 'cultural exogamy' (Boutry 2007b, 2014b), consisting of systematic intermarriages between Burmese fishermen/entrepreneurs and Moken women, based on the traditional relationship of the nomads to their patron/entrepreneur (the *taukay*[7]). This cultural strategy can be considered a 'social fact' as all fields of Burmese and Moken society have become interlinked: cosmology (by invoking entities of Moken folklore, such as mermaids), ritual life (by worshipping the Moken *nat*[8] on land-related issues), culture (by oscillating between an ideal sedentary and a symbolically nomadic way of life, resulting in actual mobility) and society (by marrying 'wild' people, *yaing* in Burmese). All these changes have resulted in social segmentation between two extremes: (1) Moken integration into the wider Burmese social space, and (2) the ethnicization of Burmese fishermen (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008).

I will not discuss here the consequences of Burmese cultural exogamy on Moken identity and culture. I will simply underline the fact that these

6 The innerlands of the Tanintharyi Division are mainly exploited by Myanmar companies benefiting from Thai investments developing the agricultural exploitation of oil-producing palm trees.

7 The *taukay*, term of Chinese origin, defines the patron that will provide rice and other consumption goods to the Moken in exchange for their collected products. Traditionally, the *taukay* used to receive a wife from a Moken group in exchange for his loyalty to the group.

8 Actually, Moken spirits related to the territory are ancestors according to the nomads, but when worshipped by the Burmese mediums (*nat kadaw*, meaning spirit's spouse), they are qualified as *nat*, referring to the spirits worshipped in the cult of the 37 lords.

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intermarriages have been generally accepted by the nomads and that, when compared to any other attempt to 'integrate' them at a national level (national parks, sedentary camps, folklorization and national ethnic festivals in both Thailand and Myanmar), this phenomenon represents examples of actual adaptation by Moken society to the rapid changes occurring in the region (Boutry 2014c). Indeed, the mutual association characterizing these interethnic communities in the Mergui Archipelago helps preserve the nomadic ideology (non-accumulation, exogamy and peripheral economy) while securing a place for the nomads in the exploitation of marine resources, as well as in the cosmological appropriation of the environment (the nomads are recognized as the first inhabitants of the islands and, in that respect, they retain their control over the sea through their technical and mythical knowledge). In return, they provide the necessary means for the Burmese fishermen to compete with the more intensive fishing industries practised on the coast (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008). Moreover, these communities are the backbone of economic exchanges between the north and the south of the archipelago, and are directly connected to the Thai side of the border (most of the archipelago's products are exported to Thailand).

## The Burmese Adaptive Colonization of Thailand

Burmese migrations to Southern Thailand can be seen as an extension of the Burmese social space in the appropriation of pioneer regions and, at this point, they are even identified as 'Master of the Sea' (Kyaw Thein Kha 2010). The significance of this characterization, made by a Burmese journalist for the *Irrawaddy* newspaper, lies in the recognition of a new and valued facet of Burmese identity, perhaps as a direct consequence of the recent development of the fishing industry by the Burmese in the Tanintharyi Division. Of course, the dynamism of these migrations is enhanced by globalization and the market-driven need for cheap labour. Liberalism, globalization and illegal immigration go hand-in-hand, but even though this may be a well-known configuration, the structural causes remain cultural. The Burmese can not only change and adapt easily, but they also know how to transform and adapt their social and cultural characteristics in appropriate ways. Only intimate research rooted in Anthropology, working towards an understanding of the dynamism of these new social spaces, will allow us to understand the roots of this phenomenon. It may also be able to help explain the difficulty migrants have in coping with new national contexts and international bodies. There is no single case that can

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accurately describe the lived reality of these migrants. This is the result of what Barth (1969) explains regarding the constitution of ethnic groups, but it should be studied at the point of social and ethnic interactions. These people are also the real descendants of Scott's Zomia (Scott 2009), a continuing and extended phenomenon in present-day Southeast Asia, evinced in the fact that there are still people living outside state control but within the territory demarcated by the jigsaw of borders dividing the region. However, Zomians are not 'ill-defined' people scattered around the marginal land between states; they are those who strive for freedom in an endangered environment surrounded by police, immigration and slavery (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009). Regardless, they build new social bases and force the state to respond. The constitution of such an issue calls for an anthropological approach, which should explain the way this population thinks and adapts as opposed to how nation-states and international bodies respond.

## Migrations, Exchanges and the Making of Borders

To summarize the situation, the South of Thailand, between the border with Myanmar in the north and with Malaysia in the south, has been developed essentially by migrants. Successive waves can be distinguished by the exploitation of different types of resources, beginning with tin mining by Chinese entrepreneurs (Fournier 1983), and moving quickly towards rubber industries supported by an Isaarn (Northeastern Thailand) workforce, then fisheries developed by Burmese crews and, later on, the development of the tourism industry involving many different strata across various populations. The structuring of the multi-ethnic context in this region is based mainly on intermarriage, patron-client relationships and rituals. The yearly tenth month ceremony (*ngan bun duean sip*[9] in Thai) recalls the complex links between minorities (sea nomads) and recently arrived dominant groups (Thai, Chinese and Malay) and is one of the region's main expressions of 'ethno-regionalism'. The ritual lasts a whole month and reveals the structure of the region on national (the economic sphere and the dominance of Buddhism), regional (patron-client systems and the sharing of rituals among populations) and local levels (intermarriage and the belief in the existence of local supernatural identities). Recent developments in this ceremony have seen the involvement of the Burmese migrant population playing different parts in the ritual event. Some take on the same role as

9 Ferrari, this volume.

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the sea nomads, receiving gifts from the dominant population, while others declare commonality with the dominant groups and donate to the nomads[10].

The idea I want to stress is that the sharing of a territory and its resources, in any form, involves the 'sacrifice' of a part of a population's identity to syncretism and intermarriage. In this way, Chinese entrepreneurs married Thai women in the south of Thailand, as Burmese fishermen married Moken women in the Mergui Archipelago. This is enacted to claim a degree of legitimacy, and control, over the resources of a territory. This cultural strategy echoes other phenomena on the other side of the border. It appears that in Southern Thailand, former Burmese agriculturalists who have recently taken up fishing as an occupation have abandoned the ideals of their home communities to marry with other migrants, often former prostitutes (Boutry & & Ivanoff 2009), in Ranong. This can be interpreted as a strategy heralding both settlement and social reproduction, and therefore can be seen as a first step in the colonization of the south of Thailand. While the imagination of the dominant society strives to segment ethnic identities, data gathered in Ranong shows that a number of Thai citizens in the town are of Burmese heritage[11]. However, while Chinese origins are openly acknowledged and are even the subject of pride (the founder of Ranong is officially recognized as Chinese), Burmese origins are mostly denied, running counter to the construction of Thai identity[12]. Nonetheless, it appears that patrons may rely upon these Burmese origins to develop trafficking networks and to employ Burmese migrants.

In fact, on both sides of the border, intermarriage and *taukay* patron-client relationships structure the transborder space, showing us that the

10 However, the Burmese implication in this ritual remains to be studied and raises the broader question of their integration in this framework.

11 To go further in the region's 'ethnogenesis', a systematic study regarding Thai citizens' founding of Ranong would be necessary.

12 'In the light of Thai-Burmese relations, problems persist partly because the Thai state has constantly imagined the nationhood for its own purposes. The reversal of Burma's image from that of national enemy to newfound friendship and back again is a result of the changing needs of legitimacy of Thai politicians. This shifting process is successfully legitimized through the celebration of Thainess and some Thai social norms. In fact, the employment of Burma's image to sustain Thai elites' legitimacy is not new to historians. In this book, emphasis is also placed upon Thai-Burmese historical relations in order to prove that Thai nationhood has long been the leaders' apparatus in the achievement of whatever interests they had in mind. [...] From 1988-2000, the three major issues facing Thailand and Burma which allowed Thai nationhood to emerge as the order-of-the-day were ethnic insurgencies along their borders, the thriving drugs trade and the Thai support of Burma's admission into ASEAN in 1997. These issues exemplify how the Thai leaders upheld khwampenthai in order to escape from local and international constraints of formal norms and pursue their private interests.' (Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2005: preface).

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cultural reasons behind Burmese migrations are too often hidden by the constitution of the administrative border. The enforcement of the border had two paradoxical consequences on the Thai side. Until the 1980s, crossing the border was easy, allowing economic exchange and the existence of a pool of labour for seasonal work in Thailand. Although mobility was greater, the flux of migrant workers was less than it is at present. The reinforcement of the border accelerated the different levels of economic development in the region between Myanmar and Thailand (thus heralding a new Burmese social strategy couched in economic terms). Moreover, the seasonal flux of Burmese workers was reduced in size, but the number of migrants did not diminish. On the contrary, former transborder workers were forced to settle permanently on the Thai side if they wanted to continue working in Thai industries. In addition, the fisheries sector in Thailand was still developing in the 1990s, requiring increasing amounts of cheap labour. The Thais do not belong to a seafaring culture, leaving an unoccupied economic niche for migrant workers. Indeed, in Thailand, immigrants (mainly from Myanmar and Cambodia) represent 90% of the maritime industry (Thailand Seafarers Research Team, Ministry of Public Health & UNDCP 1997: 36). The Burmese who had already developed their maritime culture through the colonization of Tenasserim and the Mergui Archipelago went to occupy the economic niche of South Thailand's fishing industry. Thus, the administrative border stimulated Burmese migration towards Southern Thailand, and led to interaction with the regional pattern of social, cultural and ethnic relationships characteristic of the Malay Peninsula.

Therefore, the dynamics of the Sino-Thai-Burmese population, a *de facto* transborder community, were greatly changed by the fuelling of the economic Burmese migration into Thailand due to the enforcement of borders. As *taukay*, they worked closely with smugglers (*pueza* in Burmese), demanded the establishment of new businesses for Burmese workers and served as relays to provide Burmese labour throughout Southern Thailand all the way to the border with Malaysia. In the ethno-regional pattern of the Malay Peninsula, defined by the shaping of interethnic relations in its politico-religious organization (Ivanoff 2011b), the Burmese (*Phamar* in Thai) became an ill-defined ethnic group. One could even state that the use of the appellation *Phamar* can be considered as an exonym to encompass the interlocking of ethnic, geographic and social boundaries constituting an intermediary social space (Ivanoff 2010), itself part of ethno-regionalism. The Burmese may identify themselves as *Phamar*, whatever their origins when dealing with Thais, Moken or Moklen. An example of the categorizing of the Burmese by the Thais is a plant much consumed by the Burmese

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which is called *bai som ma* in the Southern Thai language, translating as 'the sour Burmese leaf'[13]. This ethnic space, defined from the outside, is the matrix of the Burmese adaptive colonization of Southern Thailand. However, within this space, the Burmese organize access to resources and society through different categorizations, recreating hierarchies from mixed ethnic and social origins.

## The Perception of Borders and Segmentation of Migration

When we try to understand the phenomenon of Burmese migration, instead of considering the migrant population as homogeneous, we must take into account several interacting factors that structure their social space. These factors correspond to the two borders mentioned above. The first border is administrative. Thai-Burmese middlemen had to integrate this border into their representations of social space. Nonetheless, many of them have both Thai and Myanmar identity cards, thus allowing them to play with the border due to their fluid and multiple identities. Therefore, they keep the historical networks between Myanmar and Thailand alive by owning businesses on both sides of the border.

However, for Mon migrants from Myanmar, the administrative border may not be of such tremendous importance, except in localized concerns about mobility (the ability to cross the border and reach their destination). In reality, the administrative border, instead of being restrictive, allows the political border between them and the central power of Myanmar to transform into a cultural interface with the Thais. The Mon are considered by the Myanmar government to be an ethnic minority and are therefore a group in possession of a lower status in the explicitly stated hierarchy of the state (Bamar ethnicity is placed above all), which concretely resulted in decades of oppression from the central government (South 2003). However, the Mon from Myanmar identify themselves as ethnically closer to the Thai who, in return, consider them as closer relations than the Burmese for historical and cultural reasons (notably, the Mon fled the Burmese kingdoms in the late 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries to Siam where they sought refuge and even obtained positions of high rank within the Siamese administration). As a direct socio-economic consequence, Thai patrons trust Mon migrants more than those of a different ethnic background from Myanmar. In fact, in the fishing industry, they often win the envied position of foreman and

13 Personal communication of Olivier Ferrari.

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are in control of the Burmese crew (their salary, behaviour on board and employment). Therefore, the perception of these borders – the product of Thai-Burmese historical relationships, Myanmar politics and migrant socio-economic issues – acts as a source of ethnic empowerment for the Mon upon their arrival in Thailand. Hierarchy is even reversed between them and the Burmese, for whom they often act as smugglers (*pueza*) and recruiters. Consequently, Mon are often identified by the Burmese living near the border as *baw-lon'* (literally 'football'), a pejorative term conveying the meanings of mobility and inconstancy. In addition, they are perceived as customary migrants, with the majority of them keeping close links with their homeland in Myanmar.

Another transborder population consists of the Burmese coming from Dawei, who are mostly found in Ranong and in the fishing ports to the south. Coming from the south of Myanmar, they distinguish themselves by their singular dialect (mostly incomprehensible to Burmese from the centre of the country) and their skilled fishing practices. Indeed, Dawei is the oldest marine fishing port of Southern Myanmar. This particularity draws them along migration routes in the direction of the fishing port of Samut Phrakan near Bangkok. About 20 years ago, in Ranong, they were employed on Thai fishing boats during the dry season, returning to Myanmar during the monsoon. However, over the course of the 1990s, the administrative control of the border reduced their mobility and caused huge and permanent settlement in Southern Thailand's fishing ports. In the 1990s, the overcrowded settlement of people from Dawei in the port of Savampla (Ranong) resulted in crime and violence. It seems that the Thai government provided more space for family settlement to pacify the area (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009). Their predominance among the fishing crews (under the supervision of Mon foremen) is the product of another conception of the territory based on this group's control of the sea, which represents, as we have seen, a cultural border in Myanmar. This particularity, which may put them at the lowest level of Burmese social hierarchy, proved to be an asset when they settled in Thailand. Many of them, at least in the main 'Burmanized' border town of Ranong, contracted informal marriages locally with other migrants, and gave birth to a new generation of Thai-born children, causing debates on such issues as education. Such problems cannot be ignored by the local Thai government, and different kinds of schools are now available, some opened by NGOs and some by the government. The latter has been facing a dilemma between the desire to refuse the integration of the Burmese and the necessity to educate children in order to inculcate 'moral values' in them.

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While the three categories of migrants mentioned above appear to have either direct or indirect links with the Burmese-Thai borderlands in the south, we may consider the other migrants as a final and ill-defined category. It appears that more and more Burmese from the centre and north of the country are passing through the southern borders to migrate to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. Being quite unaware of the 'migration business' in the south, in comparison to other migrants, they are more at risk of being trafficked (for example, the Burmese prostitutes in Ranong are mainly from Yangon). Furthermore, despite profiting from the established migrant networks in Southern Thailand, they participate, to a lesser extent, in the adaptive colonization process of the region, mostly in aiming to travel to Malaysia and Singapore. For example, it is well known in Kawthaung that Chin migrants (from the north of Myanmar) use the southern routes to penetrate these two countries. The Burmese refer to them as *khyin'-lon'*, the name of the traditional ball game in Myanmar, in comparison to the name given to the other migrants: *baw-lon'*.

Finally, it appears that the ethno-social hierarchy prevailing in Myanmar is completely reversed once the border has been crossed. The Mon, an oppressed minority in Myanmar, are given power over the other migrants. The Burmese originally from Dawei, although they are considered as part of the Burmese 'race', are perceived traditionally as 'wild' in Myanmar due in part to their dialect but also because they have closer ties to the sea than to the land. However, in Thailand, they profit from the economic niche of the fisheries sector and from numerous other industries (rubber, construction, etc.). Last but not least, the migrants coming from the centre of the country, closer to the ideal Burmese identity, are relegated to the more exploited segments of the migrant population.

## Conclusion

Since Barth published his *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* in 1969, the Anthropology of Borders has developed as a proper field aiming to use 'borders', in a broad sense, as a new angle in the study of society. This approach leads us to question many concepts, including the nation, the state and the common centre-periphery based approach. However, we must also follow the criticism offered by Baud & Van Schendel (1997) to the historians who 'have paid much less attention to how borderlands have dealt with their states.' In Anthropology, we also need to give more attention to 'borderlander narratives' (Horstmann & Reed

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2006) and find an 'interstitial' approach (Winichakul 2003). Borderlands can barely be understood using approaches that take nations and states as demarcating societies' true spatial extension. Of course, to live within national borders means to belong to an administrative system and to follow its rules and regulations, but the systems in place in many Southeast Asian countries show that the functioning of these centralized powers is definitely relative compared to the hold that patron-client systems, middlemen and local 'men of power' have on society.

Nonetheless, borderlands, which may be understood here as multi-ethnic social spaces in interaction, can inform us on issues regarding the state, territories and sovereignty and, above all, the construction of societies. Indeed, the social space of Myanmar migrants in Southern Thailand encompasses a geographically vast region that may extend from the Tanintharyi Division to the extreme south of Thailand, and perhaps even to Malaysia. This social space is also constituted at a regional level, with migrants moving from Yangon to Bangkok. These processes are further extended to an international level, since Thailand is a rerouting hub for the Burmese heading towards Malaysia, Singapore and Australia. This 'supra' social space, constituting a form of unified entity in Southern Thailand, is the result of interlocking intermediary social spaces that interact according to the perceptions of different kinds of borders (ethnic, cultural and administrative) within the multiethnic reality of the region. Thus, the Myanmar migration phenomenon is not shaped as much by the administrative decisions of the centralized powers of Yangon and Bangkok, and does not depend on the regulation of the international border as such. The principal effect of the administrative border has been to project the Burmese further into the Malay Peninsula. From this point onwards, it is easy for them to belong to the ethno-regional system. Indeed, the Malay Peninsula has been a crossroads between insular and continental Southeast Asia and the West and the East, as well as a place of exchange since prehistory (Bellina 2006), appropriated by successive waves of populations, from Austronesian nomads to the comparatively recent Malay and Thai colonizations. And yet, all these populations interact through socio-economic and ritual systems to share the territory and its resources, from the nomads confined to the maritime realm to the Chinese controlling the 'upper' levels of production. As a result, the 'ethnicized' Burmese, being the first source of labour to access and to 'work' the resources of Southern Thailand, will undoubtedly be integrated into this pattern, forcing the Thai government to find ways to relate to them.

# 4 The "Interstices"

## A History of Migration and Ethnicity

*Jacques Ivanoff*

Anthropologists and historians now find themselves within 'new fields of research' (Abu Talib Ahmad & Tan Liok Ee 2003), within the 'margins' and the 'interstices', among those who have refused to become part of the nation-state. Anthropologists have long been studying these cultural areas and their 'forgotten' populations that historians are now discovering, resulting in the validity of the work of anthropologists finally being recognized. The figureheads of this movement are James Scott (2009) and Thongchai Winichakul (2003).

These 'interstices' could reveal the movement of a 'global' history, in other words, the history of the centre, with increasingly dynamic objectives and through the narratives and histories of the 'others' who are inscribed in the sidelines of a homogenized history aimed at building national identity. The history of the 'others', which considers the state's peripheries as being just as valid in terms of historiography as the histories written by the dominant population of the centre, has strong connections to the anthropology of borders, especially since the latter field of study reveals a game of smoke and mirrors that enables the margins and the centre to develop themselves in relation to each other (Ivanoff 2010). The importance of the study of interstices in the field of history was revealed through Winichakul's groundbreaking work in *Siam Mapped* (2005 [1994]) on the ancient systems of multi-vassalities and the modern historical adjustments that came with the construction of a 'homogenous' national territory. Winichakul's work was instrumental in awakening an entire generation of historians to their personal limits regarding their position and nationality (Pavin Chachavalpongpun 2004), and it paved the way for those who rewrote the history of colonialism.

In describing a territory he calls 'Zomia', a region stretching from Afghanistan to Vietnam and encompassing populations who refuse to live according to state norms, Scott has put forward a history of national constructions that includes those who were once excluded from it. Winichakul reinforces this position by discussing the 'history of the interstices' as being more valid than the state-orchestrated national history, the latter of which is imprinted with ideology and errors. This recent rapprochement between the fields of history and anthropology through notions such as 'Zomia', 'dissimilation' (Benjamin 2002), and 'interstices' is not simple, as historians, despite having

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accepted the work and ideas of anthropologists, do not consider themselves as anthropologists. It is thus a matter of questioning the endovision of their field of study. Social archaeologists quickly learned that there was a 'blank' in historical areas and theories. They dwelt on the organic relationships between nomads and sedentary peoples, between the borders and the centres, which were issues that anthropologists and historians dealt with separately, with the former focusing on the margins and the latter on the centre.

The anthropology of borders refers to a space that is imagined for some (i.e. territorial policy thinkers) and very much real to others (i.e. migrants). In either case, it needs to be defined. In the field of present-day anthropology, it is important to mention the work of Georges Condominas, specifically in reference to his notion of 'social space' (1980). It is indeed a type of construction that takes place at the borders and within the movements of ethnicities to recompose themselves. The notion of social space has spatial, temporal, geographic and sociological ramifications, thus becoming an adequate tool for discussing the topic of border populations. Communication spaces (i.e. the space built from migratory movements), as well as the ethnic reconfigurations and segmentations that result in the concept of ethnicity having to be constantly redefined, are paving the way for new perspectives in research. The construction of this space relies on powerful cultural dynamics. For these minority populations who know how to adapt themselves, these dynamics are multisecular. As a result, this study will adopt an ethno-historical angle in order to better grasp the concept and processes of ethnic construction at the borders, the dynamics of which will be combined with a glimpse into the interstices. 'Ethnic' practices at the borders have, for the long term, been inscribed in the field of anthropology, and studying them would be an ideal way to enable us to build new spatio-ethnic referents. Within their field of study, both Scott and Winichakul have attempted to think 'outside the box' by adopting a new historiographical approach with the aim of opening up new fields of discussion and changing discourse on the emergence of the state. They looked outwards, towards the limbs of 'stateless' regions, in the interstices of history. They observed these places of refuge with a new outlook, searching for answers among the populations who were conquered and pushed to the margins, or among those who broke off from the centre. They rediscovered those who conquered, and those who were forgotten (sometimes voluntarily), the latter of whom put forth a discourse on the establishment of territories and are capable of filling the 'voids' of history that were previously filled by official historiography.

Scott's Zomia seems to be a reliable account of the reversal of notions of hierarchy in the analysis of minorities, state relationships and the translation

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of these cultural choices into conscious objectives. This displaces research that works from the centre towards peripheries, an example emphasized by Scott in his creation of 'fictional' territories. Zomia is a zone of refuge (and a space of identity preservation), bordering fixed centres with ideologies based on Morganian scales as applied to populations. Let us not forget that this marginal system has been present since the beginning of states. Indeed, there can be no state without nomadic or peripheral populations as they are the necessary '*others*', given their ability to develop new ideologies to survive as ethnic groups and to find solutions in times when they are cut off from the centre nation's affairs. At the same time, peripheral nomadism moves geographically and culturally with the 'sedentary' states. Scott only rediscovered what anthropologists had already inscribed in their methodological records. Barth (1969) admittedly understood that an ethnic group could only be comprehended as a whole set of relations and that interrelations can be constitutive of social dynamics. However, he only hypothesized this issue and failed to ask whether there are limits to the interactions necessary to bring about the disappearance of an ethnic or social group. Further, he did not propose a point at which a given social group can take advantage of an ethnic group or, inversely, when a segment of a so-called 'sedentary' population can become an ethnic group (Ivanoff 2005, Boutry & Ivanoff 2008).

## How was the first Zomian created?

The commitment made by Asian states to their ethnic minority populations usually involves notions of citizenship and the application of universal human rights norms and values in addressing minority issues. Since the mid-1990s, some democratizing multi-ethnic Asian states have sought to accommodate their minorities through the introduction of democratic reforms aimed at granting minority groups inclusive citizenship in the form of more egalitarian or improved rights and freedoms within the nation-state. In many other Asian states, however, ideas of citizenship have been repressively standardized in the sense that uniform nation-building projects of the majority have sought to delegitimize minority claims to cultural diversity and autonomy. Asia's ethnic minorities have generally responded to these different forms of state behavior in one of four ways: 1) by embracing citizenship based on civic nationalism as the most democratic form of non-majoritarian, non-plebiscitarian accommodation, 2) by forfeiting their collective claim to a distinctive identity and conforming to the state's homogenizing tendencies, 3) by demanding special

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concessions from the state in order to maintain their own culture, or 4) by adopting a competing nationalist ideology and separatist cause.

In this context, the main question is, as always, forgotten. Why do traditional populations that are not a threat to the state in any way not have the right to pursue their ethnic objectives and maintain their culture in their own way? They are still different. They are Zomians within their own country. The Southeast Asian sea nomads are divided geographically, culturally and linguistically into three major groups, each the product of an apparently independent history of adaptation. Belonging to the first of these groups are the Moken and Moklen of the Mergui Archipelago of Myanmar, with extensions southward to the islands of Southwestern Thailand (Anderson 1890, Hogan 1972, Ivanoff 2004).

The second is represented by a series of variously named groups, collectively referred to as Orang Laut ('Sea People'), who inhabit the islands and estuaries of the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, the Bantam Archipelago and the coasts and offshore islands of Eastern Sumatra, Singapore and Southern Johor (Andaya 1975, Logan 1850, Sopher 1965, Wee 1985). In addition, a northern subgroup of Orang Laut, the Urak Lawoi, occupies the offshore islands from Phuket to the Adang island group, along the southern edge of the Moken-Moklen range (Hogan 1989: 1-2).

Finally, the third (and largest) group consists of the Sama-Bajau, most of whom are maritime or strand-oriented communities but also include small numbers of boat nomads, who together form what is probably the most widely dispersed ethno-linguistic group. However, in most accounts of the sea nomads, the authors forget the Vezo of Madagascar, excluding them from regional Southeast Asia and the cultural influence of their historical roots. The development of international borders and international regionalization has placed immense pressure on the segmentation of the sea nomads.

In the same way, researchers acknowledge that the Sea Gypsies of Southeast Asia are further divided into two cultural areas: Insular Southeast Asia and Mainland Southeast Asia. The Orang Laut of Malaysia have been cut off from their cousins in Thailand. Further, these divisions are duplicated by the difference in religion: Islam in Malaysia and Buddhism in Thailand. Cultural borders, frontiers and religions put the sea nomads in a position of necessarily evolving according to the surrounding environment. Living neither at sea nor on land, but rather on islands or on the coast, these groups could be called 'marine foragers'. Nevertheless, research on comparative linguistic reconstitution clearly reveals that the first identifiable Austronesians who came from Taiwan, were farmers from southern China. They would grow bird millet (*Setaria Italica*), sugar cane, rice, as well as tuber

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and fruit plants. They made boats and rafts and lived in wooden houses (Bellwood 2013: 44).

Current linguistic evidence places the beginning of Austronesian expansion, most likely initially involving groups from Taiwan moving southward to the Northern Philippines, at around 4,000 B.C. (Bellwood 1985: 107-121, Bellwood 2013, Pawley & Green 1973: 52-54). Bellwood (1985) has proposed a comprehensive model for this expansion based primarily on linguistic and archaeological evidence. According to this model, speakers of Austronesian languages moved essentially southward, settling on the islands they encountered with an economy based on agriculture. Initially they focused on grain, but added, as they moved southward, a variety of tuber and tree crops, which in some areas replaced rice as the locally dominant staple diet. Without disputing this model, it should not be implied that nearly all Austronesians were equally committed to agriculture. This seems unlikely. Instead, they probably included groups practising a comparatively broad spectrum of economic activities, including trade and, in addition to farming, elements of secondary foraging, hunting, fishing and marine collection (Pawley & Green 1973: 35-36). This is not to suggest that the early Austronesians subsisted as full-time foragers, and certainly not as rainforest hunters and gatherers. Rather, what appears to have distinguished the early Austronesians was, almost certainly, the existence of a strong maritime element and, concurrently to their economic diversity, the presence of significant exchange relations. Although they were not full-time foragers themselves, with their arrival in Insular Southeast Asia the early Austronesians almost certainly initiated two major innovations that transformed the nature of foraging in the region, both associated with exchange: namely, (1) the creation of a special niche for forest collectors for trade and (2) the envelopment of foraging groups with agriculturalists and others in a diversified economy. The principal evidence that the Proto-Austronesians practised rice agriculture comes from linguistic reconstructions, mostly from the work of Robert Blust (1976). This evidence also points to economic diversity. Thus, the early Austronesians appear to have possessed a diverse technology, which Blust describes as a 'mixed picture', 'with stone tools next to iron, probably bark cloth next to textiles, root crops next to grains' (Blust 1976: 37).

## Interactions and Segmentations

The most recent studies show that Negritos of the Malay Peninsula, for instance, went to the forest only after they had acquired at least seasonal

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access to cultivated foods (Headland & Reid 1989; see also Headland 1987, Peterson 1978, Peterson & Peterson 1977). Until then, Headland (1987) maintains, they probably occupied only the margins of the rainforest, the coastal zone and more open areas of monsoon forest and parklands. From this, Headland & Reid (1989: 47) propose that the symbiotic relationship we find today between tropical forest hunter-gatherers and farmers evolved long ago as an adaptive strategy for exploiting the tropical forest.

It is only after this specialization took place that they evolved culturally into what they are today, as they moved into the forest to collect wild produce to trade with agriculturalists and overseas traders. Negrito cultures are thus an innovative product of contact and economic interaction. In this case, contact between pre-existing foragers and Austronesian farmers resulted not only in the former borrowing languages from the latter, but also in the two becoming mutually enveloped in a symbiotic economy. One consequence of this envelopment was a kind of radial adaptation that allowed the foraging partners in the system to invade and successfully exploit what may have been, until then, a relatively unused habitat – the ever-wet rainforest.

This shows exactly how we must understand the relationships between ethnic groups: as a perpetually reciprocal apprenticeship. In part, these relationships demonstrate how people evaluate what the *other* can bring to benefit their cultural dynamism. Yet, these exchanges must also be evaluated in terms of goods, means of production and the distribution of specific products. In short, this is a question of developing and evolving within a certain context without destroying *otherness*. We have a contemporary example with the reciprocal syncretism between the Burmese fishermen and the Moken, a syncretism coerced by a systematic strategy of intermarriages (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008). This strategy is different from the one adopted by the Moken in Thailand because history did not impose systematic intermarriages, there were no mutual interests in this practice. The *taukay* system was a sufficient compromise. Thus, even today, in order to understand whether these populations will accept or reject a project, we need to look at historical movements and the strategies adopted in order to survive.

## The Creation of 'Sea-Zomians'

In the oldest Western accounts, all the maritime populations of Southeast Asia were called 'Cellates'. The term Cellates (or Selates) comes from the Portuguese word *selat*, itself a transformation of the English word 'strait'.

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The Portuguese used this word to refer to the maritime populations they encountered around the Malacca Straits after they took possession of the region in 1511. For the sedentary people of the inlands, the sea nomads are all 'Men of the Sea' (*Orang Laut* in Malay, *Chao Talay* or *Chao Lay* in Thai) on the basis of their similar lifestyle and supposedly common geographical origin and identity. In Thailand, one can also hear the terms *Chao Ko* (Men of the Islands), *Mogan* (mispronunciation of Moken) or *Thai Mai* ('new Thai', used particularly for the Moklen). As for the Burmese, they call the sea nomads *Selung*, a term found under different pronunciations and transcriptions: *Chillones*, *Seelongs*, *Salones*, *Salons*, *Silongs*, *Selone*, *Selong*, *Selung*, *Silong* and *Salon*. The origins of this word remain obscure. It may come either from the ancient name of the island of Phuket, *Chalang*, or from a part of the city of Myeik in Myanmar, this latter hypothesis being supported by the writings of Kyaw Din (1917: 251-254) and Carrapiett (1909: 3).

**Table 4.1 Names of the sea nomads per country**

| | Thailand | Malaysia | Myanmar |
|---|---|---|---|
| Moken | Chao Lay, Chao Ko, Chao Nam | Orang Laut, Besing | Selung |
| Moklen | Thai Mai, Chao Lay, Chao Nam | Orang Laut | Selung |
| Urak Lawoi | Chao Lay, Chao Nam (perceived as Muslims) | Orang Laut | |

**Table 4.2 Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi point of view**

| Locutor<br>People referred to | Moken | Moklen | Urak Lawoi |
|---|---|---|---|
| Moken | Moken | Besing, Moklen, Polao | Sing, Moken |
| Moklen | Olang Temap, Olang Data, Moken | Moklen, Kalah, Kounyt, Chao Lay, Moklen Bunga | Moken |
| Urak Lawoi | Moken | Urak Lawoi, Moklen, Moklen Islam | Urak Lawoi, Urak Mawoi, Urak Pulao, Khon Ko |
| Orang Sireh | Moken | Urak Lawoi, Moklen Sireh, Khon Sireh | Urak Lawoi, Urak Mawoi, Urak Sireh |
| Burmese | Tanao | Telung | ? |
| Thai | Sèm | Tchèm | ? |
| Malay (or Muslim Thai) | Batak | Batak | ? |

Source: Narumon Hinshiranan 1996

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An interesting ethnonym is *Besing* (M'sing, Masing, Besin, Besing or Sing), used sometimes by the Malays to refer to the sea nomads as a whole. *Besing* is also used at times by some of these sea nomads, namely the Urak Lawoi, to refer to the Moken[1]. The origin of this word is unknown but there are currently two possible interpretations of it. A first interpretation is that it relates to the name of an island, Besin Island, close to Victoria Point, at the latitude of 9° 59' N. and the longitude of 98° 29' E. This island is also known as Selung Island among the Burmese, Moken Island among the British, and Pulao Besing (Besing Island) among the Malays. Since Victoria Point and nearby Ranong are trading centres that the Moken frequent, it is possible that the small island of Besin was a rest stop for them and later provided the origin of their ethnic name. A second interpretation, not exclusive of the first one, relates this ethnonym to the Malay word for 'salt' or 'salty', *masing* (m'sing, masin), which possibly became a translation or equivalence for the ethnic name 'Moken' (Narumon Hinshiranan, 1996:198). Moken, in turn, according to some authors, comes from the association of *mo*, the waterline of the Moken boat, and *oken* meaning 'salty water' in the Moken language. However, I believe (Ivanoff 2004) that the word *moken* is rather linked to the myth of Queen Sibian who condemned her sister Ken (who committed adultery with her husband Gaman) to be drowned in the water (*lemo Ken* – 'immerge Ken' in the Moken language) and simultaneously cursed the Moken who have had to wander at sea on their boats ever since. This last theory is supported by linguist Christopher Court[2] pointing out the fact that the /è/ of /okèn/ is not the same as the one in /kèn/. Let us add that none of the Moken will say that their name comes from the so-called contraction of /mo/ and /okèn/.

It is thus possible that the name Moken derives from an ancient exonym related to salt water attributed to them by the Malay and to which was later added a symbolic significance and a different meaning in the Moken mythology. This derivation from an exonym related to salt water (*besing,*

1 'Hogan suggests that "Besing" is the term the Moken used to refer to themselves when speaking to others. Sopher (cited by Annandale 1977: 65) states that "Orang Besing" is the name used by Orang Laut Kappir of Trang to refer to the sea people on the Island of Tenasserim to whom they claimed to be related. Mayachiew (1984:1) indicates that "Sing" or "Phuak Sing" (Sing group) is the name which chaaw lee use to distinguish between the Moken and the non-Moken. [...] Therefore, we may conclude that the term "M'sing" is used by other people, possibly the Malay and the Urak Lawoi, to refer specifically to the chaaw lee who are Moken descendants.' (Narumon Hinshiranan 1996: 198)

2 Fieldwork report, 1997 (unpublished), by Court Christopher, 'Rapport de mission: élaboration d'une wordlist Moken', Prince of Songkla University, Thailand; Final report of the 'Grand Sud' project.

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*oken*) integrated symbolically by the oral literature, while changing its meaning reveals the dynamic and the adaptability of nomad identity. A similar, though simpler, process of derivation probably accounts for the origin of the name *urak lawoi* (meaning 'people of the sea' and claimed as an autonym by the Urak Lawoi themselves), which seems to come from *orang laut* in the Malay language.

Nowadays, the exonym *Chao Lay* ('people of the sea' in southern Thai language) is becoming increasingly accepted and used by the three groups (Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi) who, not long ago, still considered it pejorative. In the contemporary context, access to citizenship has become an important issue and cross-border mobility is increasingly difficult. Meanwhile, new economic opportunities have emerged through national and international aid – especially following the tsunami in 2004. It is thus more profitable for them to be known under a common name and perceived as a homogenous entity. Their acceptance of the name *Chao Lay* (which carries the meaning of 'masters of the sea' as well as 'people of the sea') also has the advantage of validating and reinforcing their superiority, both technical and spiritual, which the Thais ascribe to them when it comes to the maritime environment. Being perceived as a wild, random and dangerous territory by the Thais, the sea is the domain of this littoral civilization, which takes care of it and its tutelary entities. This spiritual relationship between the *Chao Lay* and the Thais is visible during some ceremonies (especially the tenth month ceremony; see Ferrari in this volume) and through performances executed by *Chao Lay* shamans for the Thai people, such as divination, curing or *khae bon* (thanksgiving) rituals (*rongngaeng*, *kayong*). This situation tends to give birth to new dynamics of unity among the sea nomads. As an example, the Moken of Ko Surin, while continuing the spirit pole ceremony, have over the past few years been performing a ceremony that is very similar to the *loy ruea* (throwing the bad spirits away to the sea on a small boat) of the Moklen and Urak Lawoi, and therefore symbolically integrate into the wider *Chao Lay* sphere. In fact, they were all united in one category that has split from a Malay matrix, becoming Proto-Malays or Malay Zomians living at the fringe of the agricultural world.

Despite these homogenizing trends, cultural differences remain strong among the sea nomads of Thailand, but it is a difficult task to determine precisely which criteria should be used to distinguish the three different identities among them. Traditional markers, such as language or religion do not often coincide nor convey the fluid, performative and complementary classifications used by these people. For instance, beyond the common

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ethnonym *Chao Lay*, Moken consider the Moklen and Urak Lawoi as Moken, like the Moklen consider the two other groups are Moklen (see Table 4.2 above), the difference being made by adding an adjective. However, the Urak Lawoi do not apply the same principle and often refer to both other groups as Moken (and not as Urak Lawoi). Another classification, based on locality and the concepts of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', is also used simultaneously by the three populations: both Moken and Urak Lawoi are 'island people', 'lowland people' or 'external/sea people' in contrast with the Moklen, who, living on the littoral, are 'upland people' or 'internal/forest people'[3]. The Moklen therefore sometimes call the Moken *Moklen Polao* ('Moklen of the islands'), while the Moken often refer to the Moklen as *Moken data* ('upper Moken', the upper direction indicating the littoral). This binomial relationship is a keystone in the social organization and in the interrelations of the sea gypsies whose territory is symbolically shared according to these inner classifications.

When Thai people perceive a homogenous population related to a uniform territory, the sea gypsies operate distinctions that allow them to define intermingled identities. While the three groups Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi are often presented as nomadic or 'sea gypsies' to the general public, they are now often settled on the land and have diversified their occupations from subsistence to commercial fishery and also engage in wage labour, construction, tourism, the service sector and even trading. However, the Moken of Thailand have partly retained their mobile way of life, and traditional mobility among them can still be observed when they travel to visit their kin and friends on different islands such as Ko Surin, Ko Phra Thong, Ko Chang and Ko Phayam, in addition to other islands located in Myanmar such as the Mergui Islands.

In Myanmar, the situation is more ambiguous. The Moken living in the Mergui Archipelago, in the south of the country, have already long been under the pressure of the government and in some places heavily influenced by Christian missionaries, most of them Karen. In some areas, such as the northern part of the archipelago (Ross and Elphinstone islands), they have been settled down by force while those living in the Southern part, closer to the Thai border, have retained more freedom. Even there, however, there was an almost total stop of nomadism in 2004 when the Moken confronted an influx of fishermen and military coming to the islands and taking possession of them. During the first part of this Burmese appropriation (1997-2005),

3 In Moken and Moklen language, *taao* means both external and sea, in contrast with *kotan*, which means both internal and forest.

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the Burmese were not significantly numerous and had to intermingle with the Moken to survive in the islands.

## The Moken in Thailand

In national parks, the balance between men and resources has changed because the Moken do not move from islands to islands (each mother-island traditionally has a specific number of islands for hunting and gathering) and this does not facilitate the renewal of resources. By imposing that the Moken stay permanently in the National Park of Surin (since the decision following the visit of the Princess Mother in 1985), it is difficult for them to gather and hunt all year long.

Various periods can be described: that of liberty of practice (1981-1986) during which the Moken could do whatever they wanted (hunting, gathering, going to Myanmar and the mainland to see the Moklen, or even to the National Park of Sembilan island) and the general prohibition period (1986-1990: no movements outside the park were allowed, no use of plants, no traditional boats, no hunting, no gathering). During the second period, authorities tried to integrate the Moken into the administration and maintenance of the National Park without much success. The third period (1990-1993) saw a fight between Marine Police, the National Park and researchers seeking a way to integrate the Moken without destroying their traditional way of life. Since 2004, the Moken are more or less recognized by the state even if they cannot do whatever they want. Now the balance seems to be reached since during the annual closure of the National Park (six months during the rainy season) the Moken can do whatever their tradition dictates. The more reasonable explanation for this change is that the Thais do not have to take care of them during the six months. Nonetheless, these six months allow the Moken to live their life without interference.

The main change in socio-economic patterns relates to the barter system. The Moken wanted the authorities of the National Park to be their new *taukay*, intermediaries between nomads and sedentary people. But it was unacceptable for 'developed' people and national agencies, so the Moken became workers in the National Park. Nevertheless this system forbids mobility (thus exogamy) and did not bring enough goods. Furthermore, the non-accumulation ideology contradicts the liberal economy system that forces people to borrow and keep their money for long-term projects. This was the great misunderstanding: at the beginning the Moken were willing

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to be economically exploited (unequal exchange, for example the *taukay* buy their goods very cheap and put them into debt, but at the same time protect them) by National Park authorities, but when the administration became tighter, Thai authorities very generously allowed the Moken to work in the park, though the Moken suffered from miserable daily wages and the obligation of changing their boats, which were considered dirty.

The Moken are a population that has been segmented since the closure of the Thai-Burmese border. Yet the movements of the Moken from Myanmar to Thailand have now reversed, as the Moken in Thailand are now making their way to Myanmar. After years of struggling to have access to resources in Surin National Park, the Moken can now work, build little boats and make regular trips to trade goods in Myanmar. The situation in southern Myanmar, especially in St. Matthew, is not great: the Moken are being made to sedentarize themselves, while the Burmese get access to natural resources, preventing the Moken from building boats. Thus, the link between Thailand and Myanmar is still there, but this form of transnationalism has become a form of transethnicism. This is because the Moken of Thailand now tend to be closer to their Moklen and Urak Lawoi cousins, rather than to the Moken of Myanmar, especially since the Thai government has put all three into one category of nomads, the *Chao Lay*, in order to control them better. Even the rituals that enabled transnational exchange between Moken shamans of Myanmar and Thailand have disappeared. The individualization of their beliefs and the impossibility of travelling in large groups have become obstacles to these practices. Obtaining national identity papers has also made passages from one country to the other more difficult. Nowadays, a Moken's nationality can be under administrative control. Ten years ago, this was not possible.

## The Moken in Myanmar

In 2001, there were around 160 Moken boats divided into 8 subgroups. There were also around 200 permanent houses. During our surveys, either some boats and flotilla could not be seen, or we were not able to visit them. Therefore, the figures below should be considered only as tentative ones.

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**Table 4.3 Moken demography in Myanmar (1998-2003)**

| Location | Traditional boats | Non-traditional boats* | Houses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nyawi | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| Jelam Plao | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| Lebi | 25 | | 50 |
| Lata | 12 | | 10 |
| Lengan | 15 | 2 | 15 |
| Jengo | 10 | 2 | 10 |
| Ross (mix Moken-Burmese) | | 21 | 30 |
| Elphinstone | 15 | 5 | 50/300 p. |
| Malcolm | | 5 | 30 |
| Tenasserim*** | 10 | | 10 |
| **Total** | **127** | **35** | **205**** |

* All boats and houses have a small secondary embarkation
** Total number adds 42 rainy season houses
*** We do not have the Moken name of Malcolm and Tenasserim. First there are no traditional residence islands, and second the Burmese refuse to let the Moken express their culture and even forbid them to build Moken boats.

**Table 4.4 Moken Demography in Myanmar (2007-2009)**

| | Traditional boats | Non-traditional boats | houses |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nyawi | 2 | 5 | 12 |
| Jelam Plao | 5 | 0 | 30 |
| Lebi | 10 | 10 | 50 |
| Lata | | 12 | 25 |
| Lengan | 3 | 2 | 20 |
| Jengo | 2 | | ? |
| Ross (mix Moken-Burmese) | 10 | 10 | 30 |
| Elphinstone | | 15 | 50 (300 p.) |
| Malcolm | nd | nd | nd |
| Tenasserim | nd | | nd |
| **Total** | **32** | **52** | **217** |

These tables show two tendencies:

1 The Moken population of Myanmar is stable even if the mixing with Burmese is more important and will increase. A significant portion of Moken women married Burmese fishermen (around 50) since 2000 and few are married to Karen (10). The number of women married to Burmese will likely increase in the future for two reasons. On the one hand, the

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Southern part of the archipelago (preserved until now) is the new pioneer border for Burmese migrants. On the other hand, there is a deficit of males in the Moken community. In Thailand, even if there is a slightly rising demography, the problem lies in finding a spouse outside the village of the National Park and the tendency will be to attract Moken from Myanmar or go to the mainland. Today, the Moken in Surin generally marry people within their community, but there are still spouses coming from other islands. There are also Moken men married to women coming from Moklen (20) and Urak Lawoi (10) communities. The number of Moken, males and females, married to Thai or Chinese is non-significant.

2 While the Moken community of Myanmar is more or less stable from a demographic perspective, due to the intermarriages with the Burmese, it is changing its cultural pattern: traditional boats slowly disappear, there is a growing importance of the secondary small embarkations used by women, and there is an increasing tendency towards a sedentary way of life due to the intermarriage with the Burmese men. Further, changes include the deficit of men, the impossibility to go freely from one place to another, the increasing scarcity of traditional resources (seashells, sea slugs), and the necessity to copy the fishing techniques of the Burmese (who use compressors, which in turn is one of the major causes of the high death rate among the Moken, used as divers with no preparation). Other reasons are economic: Myanmar is poor and no middleman can allow himself to take care of a whole flotilla. In Thailand, the Sino-Thai *taukay* are no longer interested in Moken flotillas even if they keep some links with them and even if most of the Moken continue to go on and sell their product in Thailand.

However, we should keep in mind that a resurgence of nomadic patterns is always possible. The oppressed Moken of Elphinstone rebuilt traditional boats after 50 years of Burmese slavery and Christian missionary action. There is a *point de rupture* beyond which the Moken start to reinvent nomadism if they cannot do anything else or go furher north or west. In Myanmar, socio-economic changes are dividing the Moken community between the southern part, close to the Thai border, and the Northern one close to the Burmese. However, in the middle of the archipelago there is a new community created by a mixture of Burmese men and Moken women who sometimes retake the sea on small boats, like in Kubo where a flotilla created by the mixture of Burmese and Moken of Lampi now constitutes a specific group. In other cases, Moken were moved from traditional islands (Domel for instance) when the Burmese started to install pearl farms or to

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practise illegal logging. The Moken then had to go on to Lampi Island, where the Burmese regime once planned to settle all the Moken of Myanmar and create a tourism centre with the 'Selung festival' (2004). The latter was a failure and, since then, the Moken have started to move on their traditional routes again. On the whole, however, pressure from the regime has been strong. Nowadays, fewer and fewer traditional boats are at sea, and these are usually the 'special' ones, specifically those driven by specialists such as turtle harpooners, shamans and sacred men and/or women. These people are now the last links between all the Moken groups who live increasingly separated from each other.

In 2013, only two Moken boats remained in the hands of Moken. 'Even the most cursory observation of present-day societies anywhere in the world will leave little doubt that people, often large groups of them, can intermarry with people of different biogical and cultural background, change their languages, or adopt new culture and lifestyles when conditions persuade or permit.' (Bellwood 1995: 2) Interaction between the Moken and the Burmese in the Mergui Archipelago, which represents a form of 'cultural exogamy' (see Boutry, this volume), respond to this very need to adapt. When a population feels that it is in danger, it knows how to react. The Moken's capacity to adapt themselves is remarkable, suggesting a habit of interacting with dominant populations, a gamma of 'ready made' answers whenever they need them or are in danger, as well as a capacity to destroy and rebuild their society within a few years. The Moken boat, which houses the Moken family unit, is the symbol of this society and has become a mere tool for them to get around and to produce goods. This boat has lost its utility because it no longer carries the ethnic values of society, nor does it ensure gathering, exogamy and exchanges with the mainland. The Moken boat has thus disappeared, as the Moken have decided to abandon it for their survival and adaptation, even though Westerners are trying to bring it back. An ethnicity that is in constant motion away from its original cultural 'database' by choosing the best options to survive cannot be frozen. The traditional *kabang* boat was itself quickly conceived when Moken society discovered their 'eldorado' in the archipelago at the end of the 17th century, thus enabling them to put to use the technical and symbolic knowledge they have acquired over thousands of years of Austronesian migrations. Thus, we should consider the Austronesians' world strategy as one that is in constant motion, adapting itself while maintaining common characteristics and strategic alliances with their cousins living on the mainland, such as the Moklen (see Ferrari in this volume).

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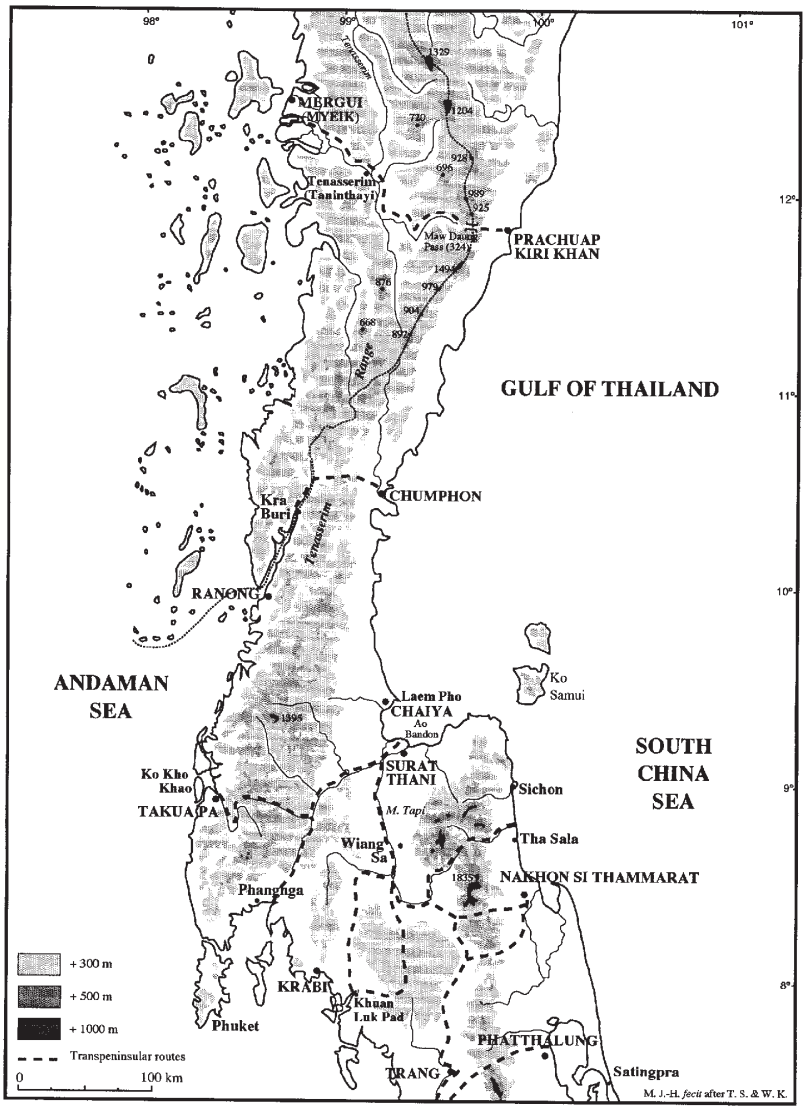
**Map 4.1 The Kra Isthmus and transpeninsular routes**




If we delve into history and track the migrations of maritime populations we can observe, thanks to language reconstruction, that although these people were predominantly sea-oriented, they were not exclusively so. We are referring to the sea Bajao, the Sama. The social structures are similar to the Moken and can provide a better understanding of this particular culture. Evidence also points to a long familiarity with farming, iron-forging, pottery-making

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and weaving, even if each group deals with different people, thus adapting, learning or rejecting different techniques. Although their knowledge of the sea was more intimate than what they knew of the land, the early Sama were, by no means, a population made up entirely of boat nomads and fishermen. Instead, a marine orientation coexisted with 'a significant and coherent tradition of land-oriented activity' (Pallesen 1985: 255), 'indicating the presence, [...] already at this [time of pre-dispersion] a divergence of orientation between the land and the coastal strands' (Pallesen 1985: 117). Reflecting this divergence, different Sama groups from the beginning, appear to have pursued, much as they do today, various permutations of this 'dual orientation', some focusing on the land and others on the strand or sea, with communities of sea nomads forming only one of a multitude of economically diverse groups (Pallesen 1985: 118).

While both sedentary lifestyles and rainforest foraging had long been options, the marked differentiation of the two came about only much later, through a process of 'mutual socio-cultural dissimilation' (Benjamin 1986: 15). In this process of dissimilation, different patterns of social organization were generated as each group came to emphasize what Benjamin calls 'deliberately-constructed carriers of ecologically-related meanings and values' (Benjamin 1986: 6).

This 'choice', as Benjamin puts it, is crucial for the survival of maritime populations. They always choose what is best for their culture: dissimilation of the land for proto-Malay groups, or cultural exogamy and collecting for the Moken. They knowingly act for or against new developments and techniques. Adoption by force is not an option, and the Moken (like a tribe of Proto-Malays thrown in the sea by fear of slavery, economic adaptation, choice) are almost all fishermen because they need to adopt the dominant techniques of the people they married, with whom they have children and who make them citizens. Until now nobody could change the 'nomadic pattern', and yet here we are in front of a whole population that decided in 4 years (2003-2007) to radically change its way of life. Nonetheless a Moken is still a Moken; a Moken has with him the ritual connexion of the sea and the rocks, the tree and the beach, they 'own' the environment and know it, and the Burmese recognize that. The Moken hardly admit that they saved Thais and foreigners during the tsunami, discretion and humility are survival strategies. But the interactions during this crisis show that there are always new ways of adaption, like it or not. The tsunami forced the interactions between the Moken and the Thai and their recognition (access to citizenship). The English did not manage to change their traditional exchange patterns, the missionaries did not succeed in converting them over the course of a century (at least before the tsunami), the Burmese did not manage to put them in camps or to settle them on certain

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islands, and the Thais could not forbid them from continuing to exploit their environment even though they lived in national parks.

All these strengths show the resilience of their culture. A Moken group can wait a century or two, and then re-appear as a true nomad. All of these strategies that enable them to wait are based on structural agreements with the outer world, namely the *taukay* patron-client system. It also means that the Moken can live in a demographic and symbiotic association with their environment only within an archaic system of exchange. The disappearance of the *taukay* forced them to intermarry with the Burmese.

Through this system of procurement, the shore-based Sama provided their local patrons with services, artisans and labourers, including skilled seamen, boat-builders, smiths, artisans, mat-makers, potters, fishermen and inter-island carriers and traders, while the most prestigious and independent of these groups, such as the Balangingi Sama, supplied maritime raiders and procured slaves for the Tausug markets of Jolo (Sather 1984, 1985, 1993b and Warren 1978, 1981).

## Ethnogenesis: Fear of Slavery Versus Nomad Ideology

This section on the Moken attempts to explain how various classes of individuals appeared, becoming Zomians by choice (the migrations of Austronesian farmers, if these were indeed voluntary migrations), and to explain how some Malays, who are Austronesians that had penetrated the rice empires of Southeast Asia, created the Proto-Malays who, in turn, became new Zomians, carrying 4,000 years of history in their cultural baggage.

The Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi are only a small branch of a large set of sea people, disseminated throughout the Southeast Asian Archipelago, speaking Austronesian languages:

> Nomadic boat people of Southeast Asia are found scattered in small, often distantly separated groups over a very extensive area. This area stretches more than 2,000 miles in an East-West direction, from Moluccas to Tenasserim, and some 1,600 miles in a North-South direction, from about latitude 10°N. to the Northern shores of the Lesser Sunda Islands at latitude 8°S. Their entire number is less than 20,000. Individual groups among them live in different kinds of strand habitat and are in contact with many different peoples: Malay, Chinese, Burmese, Thai, Bugis, Madurese, Sulu and Moluccan, as well as Dayak, Toraja, Alfura, Sakai and Semang (Sopher 1965: IX).

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Technology and mode of exploitation of the environment, rather than dialect or religion, should be considered as the main identity markers among the populations of this littoral civilization. One encounters all types of situations there, from an affirmed nomadism to a very sedentary form of life. While all of these people consider yams (whether wild or cuttings) as the most important form of nourishment, some of them rely on rice, which they either sell to outsiders or grow themselves (such as the Moklen for instance). Similarly, they did not adopt the fishing techniques in the same way. Some communities have progressively adopted a sedentary way of life, gathering in floating villages and progressively building dwellings along the coasts. In that case, conversion to Islam usually accelerated the process of acculturation, such as in the case of the Duano, who now claim the same identity as the Malay. Others, such as the Moken, reinforced their nomadic way of life by developing their naval technology, refusing to farm the land and also refusing to 'enter' Islam. Between these two extreme cases, some, like the Besisi, were able to preserve their mobile way of life, while at the same time doing a limited amount of farming. In this continuum of identities and historical trajectories, the Moken represent the prototype of the marine nomads. Those who do not conform to their model are on the point of becoming sedentary (Duano, Besisi, People of Sireh, Urak Lawoi, etc.).

Fear of slavery and plunder from Malays, Thai or Burmese armies, as well as of piracy, is often presented as the main historical factor which led to the formation of the nomad populations, either those who escaped in the forest (Senoi, Semang) or those who went out to the sea (Orang Laut, Bajau, Besisi, Duano).

Concerning the latter, Sopher (1965: 293) writes: '[...] the sea nomads, without weapons or any forms of organised defence, have been pitilessly harassed by pirates. This oppression has also contributed to their dispersion'. Hugo Bernatzik (1958: 41, note 1), one of the first Western anthropologists to study and live with the sea nomads of Southern Thailand, also thought that their origin was to be found in the pressure exerted on them by the warrior slave traders. This perspective is well established among other writers, above all the missionaries, as shown in the following text about the Moken:

> Many generations ago their forefathers lived upon the mainland of Burma-Malaya. They had settlements, with houses and cultivated lands. They were a quiet, peace-loving people. They were happy and contented. Then came the downward sweep of hordes of warlike men, the T'now (Burmese), burning and plundering. They drove these defenseless people before them. Being driven to the coast, they crossed the shallower waters

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> to the islands of the Mergui Archipelago and made several large settlements. They had plantations of coco-nuts, bananas, pine-apples and bread-fruit, with other things as well. Each settlement had its head-man, or king, and the change of life was pleasant. [...] The Batuk raided from the south. Acts of piracy were frequent. Their plantations were robbed and destroyed, and many of the people were carried off to become slaves. It became necessary to build ships so that they might take to the sea and flee from danger (White 1922: 57-58).

Indeed, the sea populations known today in Thailand as the *Chao Lay* have long been victims of the region's plunderers and slave traders[4]. Their oral literature often refers to slavery as the founding event of their ethnic distinctiveness. In the case of the Moklen, for instance, temple slavery is said to have separated them from the Moken, who, coming from the South, continued their northward migration and retained, or rather developed, their nomadic way of life.

1 Certain authors, like C. Court and M. Larrish (Ivanoff 2001), feel that the Moklen were indeed slaves and perhaps were used as porters along trans-isthmian routes.
2 Practically all of the Moklen work as humble labourers. They refuse any possibility for social advancement. It is this status that gives them their identity, but they remain at the mercy of seasonal employment by the local *taukays*, working as shrimp producers, small fishermen, road menders, rubber cultivators, farm workers, etc. They are *luk tchang*, 'labourers' (a Thai term used by the Moklen), coolies in fact, like those of olden times who were the descendants of slaves. At present, they have simply become docile manpower.
3 Before the relocation project (after the tsunami of December 2004), they owned no property except, at times, a modest piece of land, and more often than not lived on royal or government lands, depending on the good will of the administration to ensure their survival and their residence on these lands. They are the remains of slave temples and the royal slaves of former Siam. Even those who own a small piece of land work as labourers.
4 The 'Ancestor Sampan' myth of the origins of the Moklen (Ivanoff 2001) tells the story of a forced migration that occurred after a conflict with the Siamese. The 'Great Temple' (Mahathat Temple) of Nakhon Sri Tham-

4 Some of the marine nomads were implicated in the raids destined to provide the markets with slaves (the Samal for example). The model of Moken nomadism (non-accumulation, non-violence...) however, should not be connected to piracy.

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marat (ancient Ligor) on the eastern coast of Thailand is reputed as being prohibited to the Moklen, who insist that it was they themselves who built it. Were the Moklen 'temple slaves'? The separation between the Moklen and the Moken probably occurred after the Moklen were taken into slavery. This is echoed in the myth of Sampan. As for the Moken, their enslavement by the Burmese and the White Men is narrated in the epic poem of Gaman.

5 There is an oral story that speaks of the Moklen having been brought into slavery in Nakhon Sri Thammarat. Furthermore, a Thai booklet tells us about the wonders of the 14 southern provinces. For instance, it mentions the fact that the Moklen are not allowed to go inside Nakhon Sri Thammarat's Mahathat Temple.

It is interesting to note that the most important Moklen ritual follows the Moken lunar calendar, but has now become a rice ritual. By becoming sedentary, the Moklen discovered pre-Islamic beliefs concerning, above all, rice, and rediscovered their own Austronesian traditions. Whenever they can, these littoral communities engage in shifting cultivation. This is the main economic activity of the Austronesian groups who came and settled in these regions. The Moklen have become the guardians of these techniques, which are disappearing in the peninsula. They are the image of a littoral population who, when they came into contact with more 'developed' peoples, were unable to continue to follow a nomadic way of life. They represent, culturally if not ethnically, a stage in the migratory road of the People of the Sea.

Obviously, this process applies to other maritime populations of the western coast of the Malay Peninsula. In the course of centuries, many of those who lived as nomads were captured by Malays and kept as slaves within the vicinity of coastal villages. Their descendants intermarried with Malays, Chinese and even forest nomads. Some of them gave up their own culture, adopted Islam and speak only Malay. The Malays refer to them as *orang laut*, 'men of the sea', while the Moken call them *orang lonta*. In that respect, the Moken living in the Mergui Archipelago today, between the borders of Myanmar and Thailand, represent the northernmost point of a migration that started in the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, as well as the prototype of a truly nomadic sea population, while the others were 'left behind' over the course of the northward migration and were more or less forced into sedentarization or semi-sedentarization.

However, such a perspective is incomplete, and is even partially irrelevant, to fully account for the way of life of these populations, firstly because fear of slavery was not the only factor in motivating the northward migration: pressure to convert to Islam, historical events (such as the collapse of

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the thalassocracies in the Malacca Straits), as well as pressure to engage in trade (economic specialization) and to occupy fixed settlements are some of the factors that led them to slowly turn towards migrating north, and are partly responsible for the social expression of their nomadism. Secondly, it is partially irrelevant because a mechanistic explanation (push and pull factors) overlooks the ideological factors that drive nomadism and that explain the 'cultural anomaly' of the Moken (P. Ivanoff 1970). The Moken are always presented as being irresponsible and dominated potential vagabonds. Their nomadism is seen as a consequence of their perpetual flight and as a succession of historical accidents. The fact that they do not fish and only keep hunting instruments (they have been called 'sea-hunters') is often quoted as proof of their origins on land and as a failure to adapt to their maritime environment. Such views tend to deny the social dynamism of this people. Undoubtedly, aggressions and economic opportunities accentuated their particular proclivities (mobility, discretion, remoteness), and the idea of fleeing from various threats is a perspective deeply embedded in their memory. However, their lifestyle is also the result of a choice, based on an ideology of non-accumulation and on the appeal of mobility, which are much higher for them than for those who practise a sedentary way of life. The oral literature of the Moken tells us that the passage from sedentarism to nomadism occurred not because of an external threat, but rather when rice culture was abandoned for no other reason than forgetfulness, which, in reality, translates as their refusal to grow it. This perspective is difficult to grasp for external observers, such as the missionary quoted above. According to him (but the same could be said today about Thai civil servants who try to sedentarize these populations), when nomads start cultivating land, they become more 'civilized'. The idea of settlement is considered as the key to happiness, joy and power, while nomadism is seen as an option for desperate situations only and as a source of further suffering.

The Moken way of life must be seen as an evolution towards nomadism from a pre-Moken stage when they were still mixed with other coastal populations of Malay origin. The consumption of yams, and not rice, as the main means of sustenance is seen as a mark of poverty among the humble fishermen along the coast. Later, the social differences within this population engendered a new culture claiming poverty and mobility as marks of their identity. That is when the Moken community made its appearance helped by push factors like slavery. Through their technical and ideological choices, they transformed what was only a social difference into an ethnic one. Through successive differentiations, yet still founded on a common Malay matrix, they progressively became the living example

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of a rich form of nomadism in an archipelago considered to be a kind of 'eldorado', another natural push factor allowing the blossoming of nomad's ideology. During the course of history, the Moken travelled along the coasts of the western Austronesian world and were gradually able to leave their littoral chrysalis. Their final migration brought them from the southwestern coasts of Thailand to the Mergui Archipelago. From having been a part of an undifferentiated aquatic population, they became veritable sea nomads. For them, this involves fishing only with a harpoon and disengaging from any farming activities, except for certain plants which are grown by sacred persons in small symbolic gardens. Furthermore, the nomad does not accumulate, even if accumulation is technically possible (in the hold of the boat, by salting or drying fish, etc.). All these characteristics constitute the nomadic ideology, which is a conscious choice rather than an expression of their inability to cope with the accidents of history.

This real fear of slavery that led to the scattering of society and to the development of an adapted downstream technology helped to generate a reactivity towards society like there has never been before. Scattering, dissimilation, adapted technology, the ideology of non-accumulation and living on the fringes of the 'great' societies are what make the Moken true Zomians.

The issue of finding out whether they are part of a lost society, the last relics of Austronesian pioneer migrants or Proto-Malays, remains complex. Indeed, engaging in such a task would be extremely difficult. Bellwood (1995) has given us a few leads on the topic of Austronesian migrations. Many researchers have been trying to understand the dynamics of the migrations of those we may call Zomians, those who come from the interstices (Winichakul 2003) of states that built the first enclaves of 'Zomias within states'. They came by land and sea from China to Southeast Asia. If we were to accept the idea that they were equipped farmers, they might have been searching for space. They were too large in number and possessed a naval technology that enabled them to travel (Oceania, Melanesia), but also to look for interstices into which they could slip, especially in densely populated areas such as mainland Asia. Other events are still unknown to us, such as epidemics or wars that may have displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Nonetheless, the Moken are nomads. They are constantly on the move, adapting themselves to their environment, keeping only the bare necessities, transforming the 'surplus' in mythical knowledge that explains their situation and choices.

This branch of western Austronesians, which includes the Moken, ran into resistance from the societies of mainland Southeast Asia, which scattered them and furthered their dispersion, while multiplying opportunities for interaction. It is also possible that the Moken may have become Proto-

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Malays after these western Austronesians became Malay. These western Austronesians, who henceforth became farmers and fishermen, left to the Moken their migratory tradition, their knowledge (such as hundreds of hours of oral texts on Malays), as well as their latent ethnic knowledge that has enabled them to adapt themselves. Indeed, there is a very fine and blurry ethnic and social line between a Moken and a Malay fisherman. One may also become part of the other's society. Moken society is permeable and supple, guided by the need to survive and adopting greatly in order to maintain an equilibrium. In short, the Moken are the spearheads of Austronesian migration. However, they have inherited the status of Proto-Malays, apparently becoming outcasts of a Malay society that has 'succeeded' according to the canons of nation-states (sedentarism, rice agriculture, fishing and accumulation). These Austronesians, these sea Zomians, once they settled, managed to create Zomians within their own space: the sea nomads.

It is remarkable that any group of 'sea men' dispersed over millions of square kilometres has remained the same. They are content with the minimum, borrowing naval characteristics and some tools, learning the versatility of the utility of tools and enabling the expression of a dual society based as much on tubers as on rice (in fact, thousands of years ago, rice was not such a well-known plant). Nomad culture, personified today through the Moken, remains a tuber culture. It is the 'rice of the Moken' (even though exchange enables survival, their mobility, thanks to the products they collect, enables them to consume the 'divine grain', a grain that is well appreciated). A part of society remains on land, on the coast, where it continues to teach sedentary principles, such as growing (wet rice fields or repaired motors).

It is only very recently that the idea that interactions took place between Austronesians and pre-existing societies (who were not all Negritos, nor were they all hunter-gatherers) has been accepted, and that these Austronesian migrants learned throughout history and diversified according to their cultural contacts.

> Thus, on a similar matter [to that of the dynamics of small-scale cultural exchanges], the Austronesian hypothesis is not aimed at providing an explanation for the spread of a complex cultural ensemble from a single source. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to perceive how the peoples and cultures in question interacted with each other. In the exchange process, what have the cultures of the archipelago brought to the peoples of the mainland? There might have been a certain degree of influence on mainland Asia. This influence has unfortunately been

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> hidden by the conviction that the region, namely the Philippines Archipelago, had few inhabitants save for scattered groups of hunter-gatherers. [...] Furthermore, if we were to consider that human communities had developed and reached a certain level of refinement before 4,000 years, the role of the movements of populations becomes one of the possible factors among many. In this view, cultural exchanges and the intermixing of peoples become increasingly important. These cultures have evolved so as promote these interactions that date back to the beginnings of human presence in the region. We can shed further light on this perspective thanks to the increasing volume of available data. The issue lies in establishing a periodization of the ancient history of the Philippines that matches the contemporary scenarios that appear from the specific data that we have in our possession. It is a challenge that needs to be met, but for which a consensus has not yet been reached.[5] (Paz 2013: 56)

Exchanges can go both ways. The Moken brought knowledge of naval technology to the Burmese and the Thais, in the same way that long and narrow Malay boats were copied and used in the raids of the Sulu Empire (Warren 2013). Newcomers, such as farmers from the plains, may choose whether to adopt these naval characteristics or not. The integration of the new Zomian Moken, these Proto-Malays who are distinct from western Austronesians, took place when they came in contact with the Burmese who came to colonize the archipelago. However, this type of confrontation is not the first of its kind. It is certain that a new form of ethnicity will surface in order to enable the survival of nomadic culture. Even the Burmese have borrowed certain techniques, such as spreading the edges of the dugout boat with embers, their tools, their removable adze and a bit of their vocabulary. They thus developed their knowledge of the sea from that of the Moken (hence the name of many islands). Contact and exchanges are thus constantly taking place, giving birth to new social and ethnic groups, to new ethnically or socially impacted Zomians (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008).

The interactions between populations of hunter-gatherers and Austronesians have evolved over time. Some Austronesians have become distinct populations in their own right, such as the Malays who have let a fringe of their original people spread in the Riau Archipelago and in other geographic 'pockets' (Orang Kuala), giving birth to small groups of identified nomads (such as the Besisis). This is thus a process of leaving a relic of what was the ideal Austronesian to a fringe of the population, or to a Zomia outside

5 Translations from French are from the author.

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of another immense Zomia. This is evidently only a hypothesis, but how else can one explain the permanence of the language, the facility of learning, the technical reactivity and the facilities with which the Moken have been able to adapt themselves and avoid falling into the traps of history while maintaining their typically Austronesian profile? In fact, a Malay would recognize a Moken as being a relative, even though the Moken may sometimes seem a bit too 'wild' to represent this link. Nevertheless, the Malay oral histories that the Moken have preserved thus far show that the nomads have been allocated certain characteristics that are unique to the western Austronesians who have settled on land, traded, cultivated and spread into villages, as well as invented (or copied) systems of hierarchy. In so doing, they thus left a part of their humanity to the Moken, a part of their humanity that they can reactivate whenever needed.

## The Moken in History: Ancient Interactions and Knowledge in Managing Difference

> Without going as far as to assume the validity of some forms of cultural persistence that archaeological data has been unable to enlighten, we can, nonetheless, and with reason, suggest that some trading practices were established as early as the prehistoric period. From the Metal Age (around 500 BCE), communities in Vietnam (Sa Huynh), the Thai-Malay Peninsula in southern Thailand (specifically Khao Sam Kaeo), the Philippines (Kalanay in Masbate and the Tabon caves on the island of Palawan), Sarawak (the Niah cave), Java (the Buni complex) and the Sulawesi region in Indonesia were established either along the coast or on riverbanks, maintaining links through a vast exchange network. (Bellina 2013: 61)

The Moklen live on the western coast of Thailand, in the province of Phang Nga, where ancient trading posts (or, as Jacq-Herlgouach'h (2002) calls them, port-warehouses) once existed, such as Kalah, which refers to the golden peninsula, a stopover for traders, a name used by the Moken as an endonym. The Moklen are the memories of this history. They were perhaps the guardians, the carriers or the slaves of this era and place. It is certain that the Moklen, thanks to their knowledge of the specific environment of the western coast of Thailand, were useful to traders, thus enabling an agreement between both parties, as well as trading activities, slavery, etc. However, what is also certain is that it is not meaningless to find Moklen villages established near the Indian trading posts. Similarly, it is not mean-

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ingless to find, among the Moken, a mental map that can locate all of the boats that have passed by, stopped over or sunk in the midst of their islands throughout space and time. In the same way, the Moken's knowledge of the environment has enabled them to survive when the Burmese made their southward descent to practise fishing, resorting to the knowledge of the Moken. We can imagine that many traders must have resorted to turning to these nomads, whether out of their own free will or out of necessity, in order to find their way through these transisthmian and coastal routes.

However, in order to survive, one must be skilled and must effectively build a tailored 'niche' that is namely, but not solely, political (Jonsson 2011). This is what the Moken and the Moklen do: with their southern counterparts (Sino-Thais, Chinese, Malay Muslims), they draw up a map that redistributes the various roles and capacities in terms of utilizing resources, with each being responsible for its ethnic 'conditions'. In order to do so, they chose to develop a festival that is, in fact, an oath of allegiance (the tenth month festival, as described in Ferrari's work in this volume) that establishes the concept of sharing, which is a known, and thus, acceptable ritual (even though it has diverted from its initial purpose). The festival explains the status, the rights and the duties of each ethnicity, thus recalling their history, their ancient roots, their productivity, their role in each other's survival in the region, and their purpose in the multicultural social space.

We can imagine that this is what Austronesians have been doing for thousands of years (Bellina 2013). Language aside, it is difficult to find common characteristics among them. However, as far as we know of the migrations that occurred some 4,000 years ago (Bellwood 2013: 41[6]), these Austronesians have crossed paths with populations from whom they were able to absorb the traits and technical skills that suited them. In the process they left behind traces, and if needed, marked out routes and landmarks, and made use of every resource, as they have always given themselves the means to survive with or without rice, with tubers, fish, bartering, etc.

6 Bellwood considers linguistics as a stronger link between peoples with a common origin than genetics. Furthermore, we know that the few genetic experiments that have been conducted among the Urak Lawoi (there have only been 13 so far) have concluded that they are not related to the Moken, which seems highly unlikely as they themselves recognize being related to each other and can easily and effectively communicate amongst each other. However, western Austronesians, among whom the Moken are included, did not follow the same road as others. Each has had different experiences, even though some might be shared, such as slavery, which is the biggest danger to sea nomads (see Warren 2013). But, as Bellwood states: 'Yet Austronesians cannot claim to have constituted a population that is biologically homogenous throughout their genealogy' (Bellwood 2013:42).

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They have thus acquired the technical skills that are necessary to fill the interstices that no one else has claimed, extracting resources that no one can take from them. What is more is that they can flee whenever necessary, creating latent periods along river banks, vegetable agriculture, fishing, gathering, all of which are techniques that are necessary in order to survive. They gave themselves the time to create an ethnic 'core', through which technical and symbolic elements came together and became reused and recycled over time. This is their strength. The acquired quantity of information, technical and building skills, and their memory of the 'imagined' (which often coincides with that of other peoples) have enabled them to resurface anywhere and with very little. In short, the Moken, like all other Austronesians, are polyvalent. They have in common practical knowledge of the sea, as well as certain tools, such as the adze. We also know that their technical productions did not travel in packs, but instead spread amongst them, thus explaining their 'common core'. However restricted this 'common core' may be, there is a great variety of shared objects amongst them (Paz 2013: 54). In regards to the rest, we can confirm that they share Lapita cultural traits, but this only applies to a certain time in their long history. This is what the Austronesian expansion is all about. It goes far back in time and is spread over great distances. It is also possible that in many places navigation existed before we thought it did, which is the case for the Philippines (Paz 2013: 54) where Austronesians arrived and might have thus helped to improve their future voyages.

> Generally, genetic data confirms the hypothesis of a shifting population, but one has yet to come up with a satisfactory answer when it comes to the scope of these movements, their chronology and the nature of the cultures encountered on the islands of Southeast Asia. (Paz 2013: 53)

Through linguistics, the transformation of certain phonemes and the disappearance of big political centres that held them back (see Ivanoff 2004), we can explain the movements of certain groups of Austronesians, such as those from the west. These groups started to colonize the Malay coast from the 16$^{th}$ century onward, arriving in Langkawi, the temporary centre where they gathered and that enabled them to share their knowledge and to renew their ethnic dynamics in order to develop possible migration choices. This is how we may explain the appearance of the first groups of sea nomads who exist to this day, such as the Urak Lawoi, the Moklen and the Moken. They split off, and came together again (in Phuket for example). Furthermore, external events (temple slavery or transisthmian routes for example) gave

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way to the latest nomadic organizations known today. The Moken fled to the Mergui Archipelago where they witnessed important developments in the separation of sub-groups, the exploitation of resources, exchange and naval innovation. They stayed in contact with their predecessors who are more rice-oriented (let us not forget that rice was not as fundamental as it is today), living on coastlines, just as their ancestors had been doing for thousands of years. Polyvalence is one of the necessary characteristics in order to survive. The experience that they have acquired throughout their migrations has enabled their survival, and it is 'thus convincing that, when it comes to the first expansion wave of Austronesian speakers, their means of subsistence may have included the farming of edible roots and the exploitation of the forest, both of which were well adapted.' (Paz 2013: 55)

> In terms of economics, Lapita culture relies on the conjunction of horticultural and marine means of subsistence, without rice nor grain. [...] Swine, poultry and dogs can all be found in Lapita remains. (Bellwood 2013: 45)

It is thus obvious that a population that has shared common traits for the last 4,000 years as a result of groups interacting with each other along their journeys has created specific social forms that were adapted to their environment (the attachment to tubers, the links between Austronesian sea nomads and nomadic coastal groups, as well as any type of strategy that facilitates their dissimilation, as put forward by Benjamin, then by Scott). It has been suggested that the ethnicity of these Austronesian sea peoples is, firstly, well adapted to establishing itself within renowned, even too renowned, economic niches of forest products (Hutterer 1988; Bellina 2013). However, this is not the case. If these populations took to the forest or the sea, it is because they knew the environment, the knowledge of which was important to the dominant populations. They became Proto-Malays[7], thus becoming the Zomians of their own group, the latter of which settled in one place. This is a case of successful colonization. There are always people who light the way, who subsequently take on characteristics that are different from those of their original group, but who build possible bridges towards an uncertain future. We may also add that some forest and sea populations protected themselves, while answering to the demands of their *taukays*. A population cannot be forced to become gatherers of market produce

7 We may also refer to the Proto-Lao in regards to the Mlabri's voluntary separation from the Lao (Ivanoff 2003).

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in the long run if there is no cultural desire to do so. Market objectives and ethnicity go hand-in-hand. Even though the Moken have, in the past, farmed sea cucumbers for traders, this has never been made a condition for their nomadic lifestyle, but rather a possibility to use their nomadism as a tool that can be understood by sedentary peoples. Even the British were unsuccessful at extracting anything from them. They ended up leaving them to their *taukays*, making do with what they could by auctioning the produce gathered.

At first, there were small groups of pioneers who started gathering as a means of survival. Then, they discovered other populations with whom they shared resources. Little by little, this strategy of association, exchange and, if we take into account the systemization of present and past Moken marriages that occurred whenever needed, intermarriages linked itself to a survival technique of division (or segmentation). In this case, a part of a group of Austronesians from a given economic or environmental niche would split in two, one group remaining close to land (thus benefitting from learning rice farming skills or metalsmithing), while the other takes to the sea and gathers sea produce. Both groups exchange each other's produce and women, and help each other whenever needed. This situation can be applied to western Austronesians, between the Sama and the Samal, between the Moken and the Moklen, etc. These might be the most obvious cases, but we know that (Bellwood 2013, Bellina 2013) this strategy has been practised for a very long time, with rice being the most enlightening element. Rice is not a staple food. It may be a preferred food, but it is not a traditional food as tubers are. Thus, Austronesians are constantly coming and going, from old to new, discovering new things and then withdrawing themselves again, all along a vast net of knowledge and complicity that vary according to the populations with whom they come in contact. We must also bear in mind that slave hunters (Warren 2013), the Iranun of the Sulu Empire, were a permanent threat. As a result, splitting up, integrating through marriage, fleeing and becoming self-sufficient, were all vital necessities. Raids were commonplace, as the Malays, the Burmese and the Siamese would use the Moken and the Moklen as slaves. In fact, these historical events, embedded in their collective memory, enabled their social organization of separating into two groups, and of modes of recognition and alliance. But, in the end, what is it to them? Seamen one day, foresters the next, rubber tappers another, these nomads, left behind by 'global' society, do not worry about anything other than being able to adapt to the slightest interstice (here, yet again, we may refer to Winichakul's work). The nomads are mobile and integrated workers, but remain nomads nonetheless. Their capacity to

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adapt themselves enables them to reveal certain latent elements whenever needed, such as their tendency to wait for the 'right moment' for the rhizome to appear.

Each has a role to play, as the Moken specialize in gathering, while the Moklen are reusing the soil destroyed by tin, using fallow hevea lands to farm rice, extracting whatever they need while roaming through the mangrove, and fishing whatever is needed for local consumption. They are also road workers and rubber tappers, and join in on the tenth month festival's ritual cycle (Ferrari 2012) in a less than desirable position, as the recipients of offerings given to the dead by those who feel guilty for their actions. Nevertheless, it is their right to participate, as it is for the Thais, Sino-Thais, Chinese and Urak Lawoi, all of whom live within a sociopolitical landscape that is expressed through ritual[8].

The different facets of ethnicity, which are political for some (Scott is a historian who adopts a more global perspective when it comes to human groups) and opportunist for others (such as adapting to the local market through their highly developed relationship with the *taukays*), are numerous and vary according to the people's needs.

## The Inner Zomian

Today, the territories that Scott defined as Zomia (Scott 2009) have become integral parts of nation-states. However, as a concept, they can be used to signify the cultural gaps between ethnic and social separations within a social space. Even though the highlands, hills and valleys that are far from the centre can be places of refuge or socio-ecological niches for minority groups, these areas may also be conquered. The new nations of the region are fighting Scott's Zomia in their efforts to open their territories to the outside world and to participate in globalized exchanges. This is further enhanced in their continued descent towards the south and their unrelenting desire to integrate the margins through development projects. In this movement, they have created new Zomias within their 'geo-body' (Winichakul 2005) and around the margins of the state's territory. The centre prevents the *other* from penetrating the sphere of national identity, which is itself built

8 This is where Jonsson's error lies (2011). The political ethnicity cannot be separated from the archetypal opportunist ethnicity that enables their access to resources, their gathering practices or their nomadic lifestyle. This political crafting is an inter-relational arrangement between groups to survive and share resources according to power relationships, and not coercion.

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around state ideology, thus leading to the creation of new social categories and sometimes even ethnic categories. As a result, Zomia is a notion that exists within the nation, while it continues to symbolize ethnic and social separation. Despite the state discourse that suggests that internal borders have been dismantled, it is nonetheless true that the centres tend to cast out those they attract (migrants, nomads, seasonal workers, etc.). This can be verified by observing the Karen and Burmese camps that run parallel to the Thai-Burmese border or the many border markets of the region, such as Rong Kluea and Poipet on the Thai-Cambodian border.

Indeed, there are peripheries in which Zomia can spread without restricting itself to hills and mountains. For example there are groups that live in Zomias located in estuaries and islands. These places represent marginalized external lands where groups can express their ethnicity. We may even go as far as to say that, within each country, there are social fractures creating other Zomias, depending on where they occur. It is no coincidence that the crisis in Thailand between the Red Shirts (northeastern farmers, the guardians of nepotistic traditions) and the Yellow Shirts (in a nutshell, the urban middle-class) nearly ended in civil war. The issue was the following: who is Thai? Is it the middle-class urban dweller from the central plains, from the 'cradle' of Thai civilization, or is it the farmer from the northeastern plateau, displaced and tossed about by history and colonization, lost in the country's nooks and building his identity however he wishes, even though everyone praises the Thai consensus? Zomia is a territory that is marked by a social and ethnic fracture, separating entities that may complement each other even though they are in opposition, as is the case of centres and peripheries. Indeed, there have always been societies that have fled the state and dominant populations by choice, such as the Mlabri and the Moken, living either at the borders or within them. The perfect Zomian does not exist, but rather is a master of retreat and of unequal but necessary exchange, the master of borders and interstices, infiltrating the country's gaps while constantly rebuilding his identity within his own territory, whether mountain, hill or sea.

The wider framework of these events and processes is the complex and organic network of relationships between nomads and sedentary peoples. Since prehistoric times, various human movements have been simultaneously taking place between mobile margins and sedentary centres. Social archaeologists (Brun & Miroschedji 1998-1999) and some anthropologists have shown that, on the margins, nomads have created vital spaces for dynamic interethnic encounters, laboratories of 'socio-cultural realities'.

People are born nomads and only become sedentary because this status is imposed by the state. Since the Neolithic revolution, even the peasant

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cannot be considered as a fixed sedentary person. The peasant is always looking to engage in multiple activities and elaborating strategies to remain mobile, to survive and to avoid disease, famine and war. Farmers are often engaged in migrational tactics. The padi states imposed an unnatural form of immobility and exerted pressure, which in turn created the conditions for rebellion and desertion. Since the new states lacked workers, they searched for them elsewhere through wars and raids. These are some of the reasons for which ethnic maps are always changing. The state encompasses Zomians who in turn recreate identities within it. For example, among the Phuan of Laos and the Moklen of Southern Thailand, memory and oral traditions in reference to slavery have become cultural landmarks.

Forms of resistance within and outside the nation-state have long existed. People are often on the move, and sedentary groups are no more than nostalgic nomads. Here, we should mention the numerous references to nomadic lifestyle in literature, extending to descriptions of an idyllic freedom through the medium of modern communications and transcending space and time (which partly explains the success of Scott's work). Westerners may be prisoners of their own histories of colonization and slavery, of wars and oppression, yet they still inform others of the benefits of a world liberated from constraints, achieved without the need to endure the communist 'ordeal'. This is the innovative post-Industrial Revolution, creating new technologies, exchanges and movements of people and goods. It is a new world in which the traditions of social and ethnic groups have suffered, a context in which they were put to slavery, albeit in a softened manner but with the same results: the poor merely subsist while they are expected to praise the liberal world that freed them from oppression. In Southeast Asia, this neo-liberal 'revolution' has resulted in provoking ethnic resistance movements, revealing an 'imaginary Zomia' that Scott transforms into a real concept. Globalization does not forcibly destroy ethnic groups. Most often, and contrarily to what one might think, it compels them to find new cultural strategies to ensure their survival. These populations, history's 'forgotten' peoples, form new social categories and become more aware of their strength. In short, cultural archaisms and new forces of contestation are blocking these neo-liberal forces.

Ethnic groups have an essential role to play in the organization of a given territory: 1) they know the resources and how to exploit them while being comfortable with the cosmological aspects of the land and the powerful forces shaping the region, and 2) the 'dominant' populations cannot forget this (Ferrari 2012). Burmese fishermen needed the Moken to help them to adapt to the sea, which they were not very familiar with. This need is

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what led to the cultural syncretism that is taking place in the Tenasserim area. The same situation may apply to southwestern Thailand, where an interethnic cosmology has been created, centred on rituals that invoke the sharing of resources and the social position of each population. This suggests that the Moklen are important, which is denied by their role in the economy. At the borders, the tradition of integration and the art of compromise, syncretism and the rebalancing of socio-economic systems still continue to this day. All the while, the state is unable to manage these processes. Nowadays, the relations between nomadic and sedentary populations are positioned within the more modern and descriptive framework of centres and peripheries. Ethnicity does not completely disappear. However, ethno-national and ethnic groups become at least partially combined.

## Conclusion

The imposition of borders coupled with the Burmese descent towards the south near the border resulted in producing a new ethnic context (administrative control became inevitable with new workers and populations). Burmese fishermen gained control over the Moken's environment and over most of their resources, but they also engaged in intermarriage and stabilized the Moken demography. The border allowed the people of the centre to create a maritime Zomia, a last pioneering front, while controlling its resources through the integration of local minorities. These close relationships also show the suppleness and the power of interaction.

Theoretically, is it possible to imagine groups of Burmese fishermen on their way to Moken ethnicization? Yes, and certain flotillas specialize in the collection of resources in the 'interstices' left by the Burmese fishermen. The mixed flotilla of the island of Kubo, which is made up of Moken women married to Burmese men, exploited the land, creating a satellite of the most important Moken sub-group of Lampi, where long ago a Burmese village was erected near the Moken houses and flotilla. This flotilla of Kubo, which abandoned the naval technology of the Burmese and the Moken to create a smaller boat size that was able to navigate discretely at night, is a segment that could have become an ethnic group had it not been for the second migratory wave of Burmese fishermen. This example also marks another difference, one that is specific to our new Zomia: that of socio-economy. The members of this flotilla were poorer and more adventurous, leading them to roam in the depths of the night to continue their collecting and fishing practices. We could think that, given liberty of practice, some mixed

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groups would 'invent' new social systems, but, in this context, it was doomed to failure because the competition was too strong. Other groups of mixed Burmese and Moken were much better equipped (the general use of the *kabang*, the Moken boat, as a main tool was replaced by new and bigger Burmese boats and even by some Malay-style boats). Their knowledge of the sea grew because they had the more knowledgeable Moken by their side, increasing their production capacities. This shows that the segmentation process could be infinite given favourable conditions (and let us not forget that we can see an ethnic group sustain itself with only 150 people, as Amazonian examples have shown).

In short, the segmentation following the arrival of the Burmese fishermen created a Zomia, but also created a new identity and ethnic models through the mixing of social and ethnic groups, and the integration of the minority into a vast operation to recover their knowledge and conquer the maritime environment. However, the relative closure of the Burmese border (relative because it has not halted Burmese migration) cut the Moken population in two, as part of them still live in Thailand. The territory of these groups is now in national parks, so they have to find ways to integrate themselves within a new administrative framework, the interaction with this new bureaucracy being less natural since it is often politically and ideologically motivated (which is related to discourses on Thainess). The Moklen, many of whom settled along the coast, notably in the Thai province of Phang Nga, are Thai citizens due to their recognition by King Rama V and were admitted as a bearable extension of the geo-body (Winichakul 2005). The Moken, on the other hand, are not all Thai citizens at present (the question of the geo-body has changed and the centre is questioning its identity by comparing itself to a particular *other*), but they are allowed to remain imprisoned in these national parks because they were their first inhabitants, protected by the Princess Mother and researchers in 1985.

It took 30 years to find a balanced place for the Moken within the state. First, there was a great desire to dismantle the 'cultural anomaly' of a group considered to be destroying the environment. Afterwards, these maritime Zomians were tolerated as the first inhabitants and valued for tourism purposes. And, finally, integration programmes have been initiated, with the help of local researchers and international organizations. They are now considered a part of the national parks and can once again use the resources when these parks are closed (during the rainy season). Thais have understood that they cannot destroy the identity roots of 'traditional' populations, that ethnic resilience is strong and that they should be involved in a natural process of integration. The Mlabri were considered to

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be a disappearing ethnic population in 1992, when suddenly 100, then 500, individuals appeared. The state's myopia towards 'difference' was felt by the researchers themselves. Hill Tribes are still specific populations with cultural characteristics, evincing differences from ethnic Thais while being Thai citizens. The Karen hesitated to embrace Thainess in order to protect themselves against the death of their ethnicity. This hesitation is what makes them vulnerable, endearing people towards the strong alternative offered by the missionaries whose religion is considered a counterweight against Buddhization or imposed Burmanization. However, the strategies developed in order to maintain their ethnicity are numerous and the Karen were able to become involved in environmentalism, becoming the prototype of the modern 'good savage', living in harmony with nature (Pesses 2010).

# 5 Borders and Cultural Creativity

## The Case of the Chao Lay, the Sea Gypsies of Southern Thailand

*Olivier Ferrari*

### Introduction

Through his description of Zomia, James Scott sheds light on some elements of the historical relationship between the state and peripheral ethnic groups, among others. He sometimes compares this to a biological symbiotic relationship. It may be better to characterize this as a relation of interdependence based on a conceptual separation of widely defined ensembles that, although unequal, allows cohabitation and the relative definition of identities alongside the sharing of territory based on cultural factors. This enables us, as demonstrated by several authors (Brun & Miroschedji, Ivanoff and Winichakul), to think beyond the assumptions that nomadic and sedentary peoples represent two independent and opposed poles. This also allows us to deconstruct the idea that both 'types' are constitutive of two different evolutionary social stages (the Morganian fantasy of the nation-state).

Scott writes about Zomia as a transnational and extra-state region inhabited by populations who, according to his analysis, emerged through the refusal of or flight from authority. It is a geographical zone, once difficult to access, within which identities could be created and perpetuated outside the state. This description is acceptable to the *mandala* system that characterizes pre-national Southeast Asia, before the advent of nation-states built by colonization and developed through free trade or communist models.

This system implies a conception of territory that does not match that of the present-day nation-states. Indeed, territory was not conceived of as a delimitated and mapped geographical entity, but rather as variably and contextually sized spaces (according to such events as seasons, war or production) centred on kingdom-cities (*mueang* for the Thai populations and *main* for the Burmese), where control over men and resources, especially wet rice (the mountainous, forest and swamp areas were not part of this system, connected only through tributary dynamics) were more pertinent than the definition of an immutable territorial and cultural unit.

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In this system, multi-vassalage was the rule and numerous kingdoms or chiefdoms were subject to the control of other kingdoms. This was not a contradiction and, in many cases, this allowed a greater level of independence for the smaller kingdoms. The regions that were difficult to access and hardly exploitable for padi rice constituted the peripheries of this system, a kind of buffer zone between foe kingdoms. Unlike modern nation-states, these peripheries were characterized by the absence of contact between states. We can begin to perceive the importance of stakes beyond territoriality and associate this to the definition and perpetuation of cultural ideologies by Zomians as well as by the states. The question is, how do Zomians and the resulting state identities and ideologies constitute themselves?

In order to better understand the history of these zones and the dynamism of the exchanges that have characterized them, we need to recall the work of Thongchai Winichakul (2005). Thongchai writes about 'blanks', zones which were outside the direct control of the kingdoms and chiefdoms, which constituted a form of 'border', buffer zones used for hunting, gathering and slave raids, but also for ethnic construction. Winichakul cites the letter of an English administrator, Captain Henry Burney, who wrote that the borders '[…] consisted of a tract of mountains and forest, which is several miles wide and which could not be said to belong to either nation. Each had detachments on the look out to seize any person of the other party found straying within the tract.'[1]

The Kha (by contrast with the Thai), the Phnong (in Cambodia) and the Moi (Vietnam), these 'barbarians' as perceived by the well-read Buddhist populations, inhabited these 'blanks'. While they did not often pay tribute, they were still connected to the states through exchange and other social links, mostly founded in social disparity and often through tributary intermediaries (as in Cambodia, within the 'tributary belt'[2]) or businessmen. Both Scott and Winichakul insist on the interdependence between the state and these Zomias or 'blanks', but they are considered as separate or even opposite entities. Moreover, the material existence of both is suggested to be based on geographic or political factors.

The works of Scott and Winichakul cover periods preceding World War II, and are concerned with the establishment of nation-states and the construction of borders, alongside the development of communications that began to penetrate the peripheries. These periods partly defined the way states

1 In *The Burney Papers*, (1910-1914), vol. 1, Bangkok, Vajiranana National Library, cited in Thongchai Winichakul, 2005, p. 64.

2 See Guérin *et al.* 2003.

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organized and formed their social hierarchies at regional and national levels. Nowadays, the geopolitical situation has changed, and even if Scott cannot fit his model into present-day reality, it is important to question how Zomian systems have evolved with developments in nation-states, and both liberal and neo-liberal modes (the latter concerned with globalization). Of course, we can no longer talk about large regions characterized by a lack of administrative control. Nonetheless, this does not rule out the fact that the populations we now call ethnic groups or minorities, nomads perceived as unadapted to the modern world, were able to perpetuate social dynamics allowing cohabitation with sedentary ruling populations. These capabilities enable them to blossom within 'inner' or 'transnational Zomias'.

It is therefore legitimate to question the factors mobilized in this territorial appropriation, which allows people to reproduce these interaction systems, which the administrative structures are supposed to rationalize or even eliminate. Scott explains the separation between Zomia and the padi states through control and production factors: the distance from the *mueang*, the advantage of padi rice for the control of population, etc. This is probably correct, but it does not completely explain the absence of control over mountain or forest areas and, by extension, over the populations inhabiting these territories. To understand this, it is necessary to move from a conception based on practice to focus on theories that allow us to appreciate associated representations. Only in this way will it be possible to explain the success of ethno-regional social models that persist and change within the new Zomias. The forest was, and still is, a territory characterized by 'wild' representations. Tutelary spirits as well as real and mythical animals represent an important facet, and their forces are considered mastered by the populations inhabiting that territory. The same logic can be applied to the sea: Court & Ivanoff (2001) wrote about the Cheweh language, spoken in Malay maritime regions, which forbids the use of some words and expressions that are considered dangerous in that territory as these could make men forcibly cross the barrier between worlds. These are dangerous territories and they have to be domesticated to enable people to appropriate them. This domestication occurs through interrelations among the peoples of the forests, mountains or the sea. This process is what Archaimbault (1964 and 1972) described for pre-national Laos and is occurring nowadays in Southern Thailand among the sea gypsies, the Thais, the Sino-Thais and the Malay Muslims[3]. Actions, such as the offering of the forest to the King of Thailand by the Karen (Pesses 2010) or the placement of huge portraits of

3 This is developed further below in the present discussion.

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the King in the forests of national parks to inculcate a new tutelary figure, show that practices and representations have to be considered together as a whole. In reality, we should avoid the idea of folklore as defined by Western thought, which aims to separate both representation and practice. The relationship between both terms is drawn at the interface between different identities, and is the dualism between 'wild' and 'domestic'. What defines this dualism is the control, or lack thereof, of the constitutive forces of a territory, an essential factor in enabling interrelations in a given context.

Drawing from the structures of the padi states, the region subsequently entered the era of commercial states, the globalization of economies and thoughts, by adapting to Western political and territorial models. The borders were slowly drawn during the colonial era, replete with misunderstandings, as demonstrated by Winichakul (2005) through the example of the Tenasserim border. This was imposed upon the Siamese by the English who did not see any reason to draw such a line between two 'friendly' powers. Essentially, this marks a change from a concept of governance based on the control of manpower and resources – in which the territory was fluid and changing, where power was exerted on entities that were not necessarily contiguous – to a conception that implied the control and the administration of an entire closed and mapped territory, adjacent to other similar territories, under the rule of other authorities. The nature of authority also changed. We can observe a movement from short-lived dynastic states to nation-state systems, where the structure is supposed to outlive its leaders. This marked the end of multi-vassalage, the demise of regions whose territory was subject to the absence of administration, the end of blurred borders and changing alliances. Decolonization heralded the nation-state and its rigid structure, together with the new necessity (or fantasy) of administrating the whole of the territory and its populations, through the definition of national identities and ideologies. Naturally, following World War II, states began to question whether they could rule the Zomian populations. This has been largely problematic.

Nowadays we realize that the nomadic populations survived by adapting the modalities of their interrelations to sedentary and 'state' populations. This reveals capacities of resilience and cultural adaptability, and suggests that we need to reconsider the myth of the 'good savage' as well as its modern avatar, the fantasy of ethnocide within globalization (which presupposes ill-equipped minorities[4]). Nonetheless, from 'barbarians' inhabiting ignored territories, linked to the states through exchange and ritualized

4 See Ferrari & Ivanoff 2010.

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allegiances, these populations became 'minorities', ethnic groups within bordered territories supposedly controlled by the central power. Instead of causing dispersion, these new state dynamics integrated various groups. Nonetheless, the state builds (as it did during the Zomian period) reserves of manpower. The aim to settle nomads, to integrate and control them is co-genetic with the nation-state and the conception of territory specific to it. From the point of view of minorities, cultural strategies allow them to face this situation and to perpetuate identities. Identities, while often in flux, are built around solid ideological pivots; the notion of 'choice' (Benjamin 1988) or 'nomadic ideology' (Ivanoff 2004) is at the core of these strategies. The fact that minorities often prefer oral tradition to writing, for instance, allows them to transmit a history that can be adapted at any time, according to the current exigencies. This allows the explanation of an evolution (it is not important whether this is real or imagined as the aim is ideological) to justify the existence and position of an ethnic group in relation to other populations (or to the state). This also enables groups to 'forget' the past (a history that would imply fixity or a linearity and inhibit choice), enabling the nomadic lifestyle.

If these peoples are 'without history', as Scott argues, this is a result of choice and ideology. Modern Zomias are more ideological than territorial, but ideology defines the ways in which territory can be appropriated. There are two aspects to this appropriation: (1) an administrative Zomia, created by state rules (borders, etc.), as well as (2) social and ethnic dynamics that allow the creation of Zomias within regional frameworks. This latter aspect brings us to the concept of ethno-regionalism, which will be explained further. Even if, theoretically, territories are rationalized and supported by national administration, we should not assume that present-day interactions can be characterized in the same manner. This presupposition is necessary to understand the bases that support the appropriation and sharing of territory by ethnic groups.

Appropriations can take place through conflict or regional social and ethnic dynamics, impacting areas beyond the region (this, for instance, allows the Karen to re-appropriate their territory through dynamics borrowed from the centre[5]). In this case, various syncretisms are built and manipulated, and these allow the definition of systems of interrelation built around shared grammars and enhancing mutual comprehension (such as the tenth month ceremony, which will be fully described in this paper). It is therefore possible to study the use of territory without focusing directly on

5 This is developed further below in the present discussion.

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the principles set by the centre, while still not being in total contradiction with it. In any context, this appropriation has to be undertaken through interaction, as no society exists as a closed entity. In the words of Godelier (2007: 98-99):

> Actually, what makes 'society' [...] is the common exertion of a kind of sovereignty on a portion of nature and on all the entities that populate it, not only plants and animals, but also all the human beings and with them the dead, the spirits and the gods that can reside there – and who are supposed to bring humans life or death.

In a multi-ethnic context, the sovereignty mentioned by Godelier has to be recognized and accepted by all actors present, allowing both the foundation of ethno-regional social systems, or its refusal, which often leads to conflict. As we will see, the Moken do not deny Thai authority but participate in regional dynamics that ensure their own legitimacy and the perpetuation of their nomadic identity. However, the same process does not occur in Western Papua, where the local populations deny Javanese legitimacy and sustain an ongoing conflict with it.

The sharing of a territorial system leads to its legitimacy, which has to be justified outside of the administrative framework, and groups can decide to bypass or confront various systems. Here lies the continuity between representations and practices. For example, the Karen in Thailand were able to manipulate their identity by borrowing ritual practices from Buddhism and the royal cults. By ritually offering their forest to the King, they were able to create a façade of the 'good savage', which, in turn, legitimizes their territorial practices and gives them a place in the pantheon of the Thai ethnic groups (Pesses 2010). Also, this underlines their legitimate rule over the forest, bypassing the authority of national parks. Conversely, arguments drawn from contiguous cosmologies were more effective than rational administrative dynamics. To understand the delicate equilibriums that allow the new Zomias to reproduce themselves, it is therefore necessary to analyze them case-by-case, and attempt to outline all elements and actors that participate in this construction.

The question that interests us is the following: how are the contours of modern Zomias and the interactions between majority societies (sedentary and normative) and the societies that are identified as minority, nomad or perceived as lying in a lesser degree of civilization, drawn nowadays? This question also implies an investigation of the nature (social, ethnic, territorial or ideological) of modern peripheries. We will approach this

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subject through the context of Southern Thailand, where Thais, Sino-Thais, Malay Muslims and sea gypsies live together. Southern Thailand, while central to the Thai economy, has a social function that allows us, in some cases, to compare it to a periphery. This is accentuated by the fact that the region is considered as such by Thais from other regions, who perceive its inhabitants as rude and violent, with an incomprehensible language. The South is actually the locus of a cultural resistance to the development efforts undertaken by the state and international bodies and, even if the abundant tourist infrastructures in some places seem to show the contrary, its social structure is built through encounters and histories that do not correspond to present-day Thai governance.

Although the whole territory is physically accessible, it was always impossible to contest the sea gypsies' legitimacy over their villages. Social dynamics are activated by them in territorial appropriation, and we will show that this takes place through a reciprocal legitimization, constitutive elements of which are recalled during the tenth month ceremony. The aim is to understand that the peripheral aspect of the region does not solely depend on the two borders (Myanmar and Malaysia), but also on regional political and religious factors based on syncretism and reciprocity between practices and representations. Also, environmental and geographical factors are important: the omnipresence of the sea, the mangrove, the 'wild' spaces that sea gypsies appropriate, the exchange dynamics that are possible due to the peninsular characteristic of the region. All these parameters are managed locally and participate in the drawing of social dynamics. In this framework, the cosmically loaded sea offers sea gypsies a 'blank' that allows them to legitimize their ethno-regional role. For this reason, we take the liberty of considering the coast as a borderland: separating the land – regulated and controlled by Buddhism – from the sea – 'wild' and occupied by the nomads. This allows dynamics of complementarity to take place, and these can be considered as Zomian. A study of Southern Thailand is therefore intimately related to a study of borderlands, even if the borders considered here are not exclusively administrative.

## Are Borderlands Exclusively Administrative Features?

Modernization and globalization are consciously incorporated according to cultural choices made by the nomadic populations (Ferrari & Ivanoff 2010), despite their being perceived as 'backwards'. In a similar sense, instead of representing a threat against their identity as thought by many

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people, the state and its borders play a role within wider social dynamics and therefore have to be investigated as elements in the construction of identity, but not as the main influence in these processes. Thus, while administrative borderlands are considered by social scientists as dynamic social spaces and fertile grounds for identity construction, a challenge to their characterization as separators or 'peripheries', it is fundamental to question whether these are the only 'lines' or 'zones' possessing such characteristics in local contexts. Are administrative borderlands the only perceived borderlands? Is their regional relevance greater than other cosmological borderlands?

Condominas (1980) provides us with a powerful tool with his concept of 'interlocking social spaces', and this is crucial in the analysis of the nature of borderlands. Furthermore, Dournes' work on the Jarai (Dournes 1972) shows how complex the 'coordinate system' can be by describing a territory from a social point of view, and therefore illustrates the importance of taking into account local classifications of society. This certainly applies to regions such as Southern Thailand, where identities are defined by the interactions between several ethnic or social groups, and thus we have to pay attention to the ways these relations unfold. Are the sea gypsies of Southern Thailand better characterized as a 'society against the state' or as 'anarchists', resisting statehood entirely? Are they a modern form of Zomian? Certainly, they do not collaborate more than is necessary with the Bangkok-ruled nation-state. However, they also participate with other regional populations in the shaping of a regional socio-political organization and in the definition of its territory. Zomia, in this context, is regional and imbricated at different levels of interaction: the South with the state but also the gypsies with the Sino-Thais or the Malay Muslims, etc. In this sense, we could investigate, as is done with social spaces, an intermediary and restricted Zomia, or as an arachnidan system, a circle radiating from the centre and creating progressive and various ramifications in peripheral (or outlying) zones. To understand the way these regions work is to partially comprehend the links between social and ethnic realities and their interdependencies. This is what we call ethno-regionalism: a set of socio-cultural dynamics that takes place within the different social spaces that compose a region, linking them according to cultural codes built throughout history. These dynamics work by themselves and not against the state, defining the interfaces of social spaces, the way syncretisms take place, their common and exclusive elements, and the way they link ethnic to social factors. In so doing, they give shape to a regional, extended social space and define the way it interacts with wider (i.e. national) spaces and external elements.

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## Territory and Borderland as Manifold Concepts

In a multi-ethnic environment such as peninsular Southern Thailand, the nature, extent and social role of borderlands is an intricate question. Southern Thailand is a historical meeting point for populations from insular and continental Southeast Asia, China, India, the Persian Gulf and Europe. Throughout centuries of wars and unions, a complex and manifold social and politico-religious mosaic has emerged. From South Asia, Brahmanism and Buddhism gave birth to a hierarchical political system that enabled the Austronesian thalassocracies and the northern Pyu, Thai, Mon and Khmer kingdoms to create complex politico-religious networks and rule the region on a spiritual basis, embodied in the *mandala* system and its multi-vassalities (Munoz 2007, Winichakul 2005). Meanwhile, Chinese envoys created maritime trade routes and the successive immigration waves introduced highly adapted economic systems that integrated perfectly into the pre-existing politico-religious structures. These are perpetuated by the *taukay*, Chinese businessmen acting in a patron-client structure and omnipresent in the peninsula. The encounter of Islam and Malay traditions (Skeat 1900), on the other hand, created cultural reactions. In the era of nation-states, the persistence of Malay traits within Islamic political structures in southernmost Thailand allows the creation of a vision and management of the territory structured by a controlled violence that enables oral tradition to be perpetuated and incarnated (Ivanoff 2010). Finally, Western colonialism, trade routes (Reid 1988) and the vision of policy and land management, as well as the globalization of the economy and leadership, introduced a new conception of territorial legitimacy and power relationships.

Meanwhile, at the periphery of these dominant civilizations, populations were able to find their place by filling the 'blanks' (Winichakul 2005) left by the other populations, while collaborating with them in the identity creation of the peninsula. This is true of the sea gypsies of the Andaman coast of Thailand: the Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi, who are part of a wider 'littoral civilization' (Ivanoff 2004) extending from Malaysia and Indonesia to Mergui in Myanmar. They comprise about 15,000 individuals in Southern Thailand and Myanmar (and more, if we consider the people with whom the Urak Lawoi – their 'cousins' in Langkawi – maintain contact) and entertain a livelihood and a nomadism based on the sea.

In this framework, the notion of territory appears itself as manifold, and so are the ways that the interfaces between territories and borderlands are conceived. A territory is a geographical unity, bordered and managed.

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However, if we know that the strand, the 'land in between', separating the sea from the land, is where the nomadic Moken society blooms, while the spirits of their dead wander there aimlessly in a definitive sedentary death, the nature of such a territory cannot be understood solely in geographical terms since it penetrates the cosmological sphere. Hence, what is a borderland? By definition, it is a portion of territory that separates different geographical-cultural-political entities. Nonetheless, it is essential to keep in mind the fact that, at a regional or local scale, territories, identities and societies possess characteristics and interfaces that are socially as relevant as administrative borders are; lines and divisions that extend, in terms of importance, beyond administrative factors as designed by international concerns. Understanding these interfaces is an essential step in comprehending regional social and ethnic fabrics. However, it is essential that we deconstruct dichotomies between the measurable and intangible to try to describe social realities as they are perceived in regional contexts.

## The Sea Gypsies in the Ethnoregional Social Fabric

The example of the Moken, Moklen and Urak Lawoi, the Austronesian sea gypsies of the western coast of Southern Thailand, illuminates how territories are conceived, bordered, appropriated and managed at a regional level – in short, the shaping of a modern Zomia. With two of the three groups as trans-border populations (the Moken with Myanmar and the Urak Lawoi with Malaysia, the Moklen are only in Thailand), it is also interesting to pay attention to the role national borders play in the construction of identity.

Few of the Thais, the Sino-Thais and the Malay Muslims are aware of the fact that these minorities are separated into three groups. Sometimes the Urak Lawoi, due to their language (often confused with the Jawi language of the southernmost Thai Malays), are perceived as Muslim, but they are still part of the ensemble known under the exonym Chao Lay, 'people of the sea' in Thai. Thai Mai ('new Thais', due to their 'recent' nationalization) or Chao Nam ('people of the water') are other exonyms widely used in Thailand to categorize these groups. Among these three terms, Chao Lay is now being integrated by the nomads as an endonym to affirm their links as well as the territorial nature of their distance to the surrounding populations. These exonyms are interesting as they highlight the mainstream perceptions of these nomads as non-natural Thais (Thai Mai, who are Thai thanks to a royal decision) but also as inhabitants and guardians of a particular territory, the sea.

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As mentioned above, we consider the western littoral of southern peninsular Thailand as a plural social space, including its extensions in Myanmar and Malaysia. In some ways, it constitutes a cosmological borderland and, due to its symbolic management by the sea gypsies, it is replete with dynamics similar to those encountered in administrative borderlands, a divide productive of social and ethnic contexts. In other words, a 'peripheral' geo-body, the sea, which lies at the margins of the centripetal Buddhist politico-religious influence, is domesticated by a marginal population, who give it a role in the creation of ethno-regional identity. Even if this hypothesis is artificial, based as it is on a comparison between two different realities (administrative and cosmological), it is nonetheless pertinent to the cultural dynamics that take place in the context of this 'land in between'.

We are referring here to representation, but we have to retain the fact that this cannot be separated from practice. Folklore, enabling this dichotomy and the rationalization of practice, is a Western idea and is not applicable in this context, despite the 'museumization' attempts undertaken by the states. Therefore, if cosmological factors play an important role in the ethno-regional social fabric, one has to keep in mind that these cannot be divorced from practices, whether based on ritual or, as we will describe here, found in productive, economic and politico-religious dimensions. All these aspects are part of an ethno-regional 'substance', the bases of the southern Zomia, and they will not be considered as separate factors. The description of the representations and concomitant practices that we will impart has to be seen as an investigation of phenomena that are not independent or historically neutral. These comprise the visible dimensions of adaptation and mutual legitimation within wide ethno-regional, socio-cultural, political and ritual dynamics.

## The Coast as a Borderland

Nowadays, Southern Thailand, this geographical and multicultural body, is part of the Thai nation, bordered to the South by Malaysia and to the North by Myanmar. These borders express an administrative reality, the emergence of the nation-states following the colonial era. However, in regional terms, they function according to cultural codes well rooted in history, as they are the locus where distinctive regional identities can be expressed more freely due to their paradoxical nature; while the state aims to control populations, creativity is enhanced to negotiate a perception of territories bordered elsewhere, according to different criteria, in which

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cosmology is not separated from political aspects. Therefore, phenomena such as social segmentation (Boutry & Ivanoff 2008) or multi-ethnicity (Horstmann 2002a) are particularly enhanced by the presence of administrative borders.

If this is true for administrative borders, it also applies to multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural regions such as peninsular Southern Thailand. Local informal power structures, trade and interethnic relationships evolve according to dynamics that are moulded in a continuum that can be defined as ethno-regional, since this extends beyond social spaces to shape the relationship between society and ethnicity. In the South, religious power is still centred in Nakhorn Sri Thammarat, where the economy is still controlled by Chinese businessmen who act independently from national Bangkok-controlled finances, where rituality unites several populations beyond their specific religious belonging while still defining their distinctive identities. Also, performances such as *Manora*, *Rongaeng*, *Nang Talung* or *Moyong* are still fundamental in the definition of a Southern identity mostly independent from the Thainess defined in Bangkok. As a result, Southern Thailand appears as a wide multicultural social space with its own cultural identity. In this plural unity, societies and territories are bordered, appropriated and managed according to regional rules rooted in tradition and justified cosmologically.

On the one hand, land is ordered and controlled by administrative and politico-religious structures founded in the Indo-Buddhist cosmology, mainly in a concentric way. The repartition of the temples and their hierarchy is reflected in the administrative organization of the territory, as are the links between the *lak mueang* (city pillars), the *chao thi* (tutelary masters of the land) and the *chao ban* (tutelary masters of the house) (Condominas 1978). The sea, on the other hand, is perceived as a sort of 'territory of emptiness': dangerous, difficult to control and the home of perilous entities. It is not a coincidence that the crews of fishing fleets are mostly comprised of Burmese, Lao or Cambodian immigrants, as this is a highly depreciated work among the sedentary populations, the traditional heirs of wet-rice cultivators. Nevertheless, one can observe that in Southern Thai markets and cuisine, seafood, mostly provided by Muslim fishermen, is highly valued, while freshwater fish, also abundant in the region, is much less appreciated. In the same way, amulets coming from the sea (black coral, turtle shell, etc.), mostly provided by sea gypsies, are considered very powerful.

The borderland nature of the coast lies at a cosmological level, but also plays an important social role as it provides sea gypsies their ethno-

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regional social position. This is a paradoxical position since, in one sense, they are considered by the surrounding populations (and even more so in the ideologies of central Thais) as lying low in the social scale due to their 'wild' status as nomads. Nevertheless, it is this very connotation, together with their status as the 'first habitants' that allows them to blossom in an unquestioned way, at least at the regional level. Dichotomies, such as 'wild' versus 'domesticated', structure the social architecture of the region as it defines the way complementarities take place. Dichotomous understandings relate to a territory and the way it is managed and, by extension, to those who manage it. 'Wild' and 'domesticated' are not absolute terms; they only exist within contexts of interrelation and are part of the way different ethnic groups (i.e. nomads and sedentary) compose this ethno-regional society. To understand how these poles coexist, it is necessary to recognize that ethnic and social boundaries are porous and that societies exist in relation to other societies. What is considered 'wild' for the Sino-Thais is not necessarily 'wild' for the sea gypsies, and this term applies more to what can or cannot be understood and mastered by respective groups. We cannot agree with the statements of Descola (2005) who attempts to remove the reality of these perceptions by considering culture and its representations as closed entities. Rather, they are integral parts of the choices that allow the sharing of territories and identities. Thus, sea gypsies themselves are not considered (and, of course do not consider themselves) by the other populations as belonging to the 'wild', but they are seen as able to control the forces of a relative wilderness, which, in turn, becomes perceived as 'wild' by the minority group. Cosmological territories arise through the definition of what belongs to the sea or the forest, allowing mutual recognition in a context where sea gypsies recognize state legitimacy and the other populations appreciate the ability of the sea gypsies to cope with what they themselves neglect.

The common aim, or the result, is the construction of a dynamic social climax (in the sense that it is adaptable to circumstance, as shown after the tsunami[6]) in which each aspect of the interethnic cohabitation, be it through structural inequality, is part of operational social dynamics. This is the ethno-regional fabric. To understand how this happens, it is first necessary to give some examples of the way the sea gypsies themselves appropriate this territory and subsequently to describe the way this appropriation is integrated into the identity fabric of the South.

6 See Boutry & Ferrari 2009.

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## The Nomads and the Sea

The sea gypsies are distributed along the Andaman coast of Thailand and Myanmar, between 6° and 12° latitude. This is an environment composed of mangrove swamps and islands, where the three groups historically defined the modalities of their nomadism. The nomad populations (a total of around 15,000 individuals) are scattered throughout this environment: to the South, the Urak Lawoi live on the islands of Adang, at the Malay border, as well as in Phuket and the region of Krabi; the Moklen inhabit a 100 km long mangrove strip between Phuket and Koh Phra Thong (Phang Nga Province); and the Moken are located on the islands of the Mergui Archipelago, between Koh Phra Thong, Koh Surin and Myanmar. The Mergui Archipelago is comprised of around 800 islands (mainly in Myanmar), which were historically a refuge for pirates and brigands (a trait that still persists to a lesser extent). These environments, together with the continental part of the peninsula inhabited by Thais, Sino-Thais and Malay Muslims, constitute the heterogeneous social setting of Southern Thailand, and partly determine the way territory is shared and appropriated. The sea is the territory of the sea gypsies, which they manage and classify according to their own codes and cosmology, diverging from the vision propagated by Thais, Sino-Thais and even Malay Muslims (who share the mangrove with the Moklen). For the nomads, the nature of their territory is manifold and, even if the open sea remains dangerous in their minds, they have the cultural means to face it.

To understand the ways this territory is organized within the Chao Lay social space, let us take the example of the Moken and Moklen. The island-based Moken and the land-based Moklen constitute a pair determined by spatial coordinates. For the Moken, the word for 'exterior' and 'sea' are the same – *taao* – while 'interior' and 'forest' are both named *kotan*. Both dimensions possess their own characteristics and tutelary entities. In the sea, the turtle is their mythical sister; the sea mammals are the 'reincarnations' of their dead shamans; the dugong represents incest as well as a genealogical rank (Ivanoff 2004); and their boat, the *kabang*, responds to a complex symbolic technology (Ivanoff 1999) that reflects their identity and nomadism (with phrases such as: 'to have a boat is to have a woman' and 'at birth the umbilical cord of the child is in the sea'). In the forest lives the tiger, a powerful spirit feared by the Moken, but also the wild boar, whose spirit has to be left at the edges of the forests before the carcass of the hunted animal is brought back home and shared. Between the interior and the exterior, the forest and the sea, are the strand and the beach, the reign of the Moken where they traditionally build temporary villages during the

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rainy season. Alongside the summits of hills and mountains, this is also the place where the spirits of the dead wander aimlessly, trapped in a sedentary death. The nomadism of the Moken lies therefore in a 'land in between', which is not only the frontier between two geographical territories, but also between two worlds (the living and the dead) and two states of being (nomadism and sedentarism, both of which conjoin during the rainy season when temporary villages have to be built). These horizontal coordinates accompany vertical ones: the Moklen on the continent are *olang data*, 'Men of above', in contrast to the Moken who are considered 'Men of below', due to their residence on maritime islands.

These coordinates define their relative identities within the Chao Lay social space, an 'ecological niche' transformed into a Zomia, while demonstrating that maritime territory is subject to a well defined social organization, expressed in the ritual life of the three groups[7] and is therefore symbolically appropriated and managed. However, this organization reflects their contrasting relationships with the surrounding padi state populations, whose cosmological territorial organization does not include the sea, except as a connotation of a cosmological barrier. How are these contrasting conceptions intertwined and how do they participate in the definition of an ethno-regional social dynamic? What is the relationship between the appropriation of sea gypsies and others in this littoral Southern ethno-regionalism? We will demonstrate that ethno-regionalism allows for the imbrication of inner Zomias in a national entity.

The Moken are island peoples, while the Moklen occupy the mangrove and the littoral zones formerly dedicated to tin extraction. In a certain way, they have re-appropriated and anthropized territories neglected by Thais and Sino-Thais by controlling and domesticating tutelary spirits and other entities. The anthropization of these neglected territories implies that they provide them with a new life after intensive exploitation, through swidden cultivation, the construction of small gardens and even rubber plantations. The Moklen were always able to occupy and give new life to these interstices, enabling their reinsertion into the socio-economic circuit of the region. This is a recent dynamic since tin mining was abandoned only in 1986. In re-appropriating this land, they act as the guardians of this territory and of its entities. Until recently, the Moklen practised slash-and-burn rice farming in a way that allowed the re-appropriation of formerly wild territories by Sino-Thai *taukay*. They cleared parts of the forest, in which they planted rubber trees for a *taukay*, while cultivating swidden rice (*rai*)

7 For the ceremonies, see Ivanoff 2004 and Ferrari 2009a.

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as an intercalary crop. Once the rubber trees were ready for exploitation, they migrated to another spot, participating in the economic development of the region within a specific cultural scheme. Furthermore, during the tin-mining era, the Moklen moved village units along the strand or in the mangrove according to the discovery of tin-bearing sand, which they then sold to *taukay*. In any case, their practices emerged in ways that enabled mutual recognition within the cultural codes that regulated it.

Nowadays, swidden rice and tin extraction are no longer practised, and the Moklen undertake wage labour for other *taukay*, allowing them to perpetuate their ideology (non-accumulation, non-violence and mobility) and their relative position in the ethno-regional social fabric. Nonetheless, their territorial appropriation is still related to the control of forces that ensure their regional status, which could be compared to the first inhabitants described by Archaimbault. This could be regarded as marginal. However, the annual Buddhist ceremony of the tenth lunar month (*ngan bun sat duean sip*) and the role the sea gypsies play in it uncover the actual importance of this appropriation and help us to explain the reasons why, for instance, people and agencies were unable to take the land of certain villages located in highly touristic places and coveted by entrepreneurs, even though they were only protected by customary right.

## The Tenth Month Ceremony

During this ceremony dedicated to the dead and 'hungry ghosts', the sea gypsies act as a vehicle for the attainment of Buddhist merit as well as 'bridging' the ancestors of the different populations. For one month, they stride along streets of the Buddhist cities and villages of the province of Phang Nga in a ritual quest for padi rice. They sleep in a Sino-Thai (linked with the *taukay*) street of the city of Phang Nga (some of them coming from as far as the Malay border). Every day they go from home to home requesting padi rice, an offer that they receive because it is owed to them. The Buddhists receive merit for their involvement in this ritual that they will transfer to their unfortunate ancestors who may be reborn in lower worlds. Moreover, they are aware that the padi rice will be used by the sea gypsies for offerings to their own ancestors and therefore, by giving them rice, they also make offerings to these other ancestors. The last day of the ceremony constitutes a socio-ritual climax, in which the 'hungry ghosts' are fed before returning to the realm of death. During a ritual called *ching pret* ('to snatch away the *pret*, "the hungry ghosts"'), the nomads assault the

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altar where the offerings lie for the hungry ghosts. These offerings will be given to their own ancestors at home on the same day, marking the end of the ritual. An important fact to mention is that Thais know that, fifteen days after the ceremony, the sea gypsies perform the *loy ruea* ceremony, during which a boat is built and sent out to sea with all the bad spirits and illnesses of the season. Among the offerings in the boat, there is padi rice, which the Thais consider to be their offering to the nomads. The repartition of the offerings among the ancestors, the feeding of offerings to the hungry ghosts and, in a certain way, the perceived function of the *loy ruea* as a regional cleansing ritual, all confer to the sea gypsies the role of being the medium between different worlds. However, this contact is not only materialized in ritual life, but also in the transformation and transmission of sea-related objects and powers.

Sea gypsies sell highly appreciated objects from the sea, especially during the tenth month. Black coral, turtle shell bracelets and ray bone rings are considered to be powerful protection amulets among Buddhists and Muslims, with monks in temples often buying *linga*-shaped black coral amulets. Furthermore, their shamans are visited by Thais and Sino-Thais every night to learn facts about the future, to make attraction charms or to 'clean' their house of evil spirits. Their links to and their mastery of the sea render them powerful, as they are influenced directly by their 'wild' territory. These ideas are particularly exacerbated during the tenth month, when contact with the world beyond occurs daily (the doors of Buddhist hell are open for fifteen days). Shamans are able to invoke forces such as the tiger, whose wilderness is synonymous with supernatural power. During this period, no policeman would dare try to stop them, even if they committed an offence. Similarly, the selling of black coral and turtle shell is formally forbidden in Thailand, but the sea gypsies practise it openly, as the regional spiritual value of these objects surpasses their legal setting. This is a privilege that is only granted to the sea gypsies on an informal basis. Again, their legitimacy as inhabitants of the sea confers them technical and spiritual attributes allowing them to gather and distribute maritime forces among the rest of the population, who are in need of them, as demonstrated by the quantity of sea amulets sold in the region. This, in turn, reinforces their legitimacy.

This interaction is a relation of complementarity in territorial management and appropriation, based on the way the relationship between the 'first inhabitants' and the 'newcomer sedentary ruling elites' is founded. The rationale of this relation is the sea, neglected by some, while domesticated by others who are able to guard it as well as share the benefits of its powerful nature. Not unlike administrative borderlands, the coast, as a cosmological

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limit, structures the interrelations between ethnic groups while positioning them in the social world. This kind of relationship strongly resembles that described by Archaimbault (1964, 1972) in his analysis of the ritual structures of Laos, in which the Kha play a role in the migration of the Nagas in the Mekong, allowing the Lao sedentary populations to achieve rice culture when the season changes. As highlighted by Brun & de Miroschedji (1998-1999), the perception we have of a cultural barrier between nomads and sedentary peoples does not reflect reality, as both develop interdependent links based on specialization and mutual interest. In the case of the Sea Gypsies, their littoral identity, lying at a cosmological interface, defines their regional integration through rituality and symbolism.

This modern Zomia extends beyond territory. It represents an important stake, but – in a context where practices easily enable movement and penetration through development projects, tourist infrastructures and legal settings – the representations and the practices related to minorities allow for an ethno-regional management in which Zomians do not lose their place. These Zomians highlight how rationalization and an imagined separation of representations and practices cannot explain their persistence nor be an obstacle to it. In a continuum between practice and representation, Zomias are still realities, as complex as the obstacles they have to face, but these obstacles (nation-state building, development, borders, administrative control or force) are constructed in such a way that they cannot consider other systems. In this sense, they are as much obstacles as participants in the identity dynamics of modern Zomias. The administrative borders are also part of these constructions and it is interesting to demonstrate how they participate in the identity strategies of sea gypsies through social segmentation and the creation of new social spaces.

## The Sea Gypsies and the National Borders

It is important to remind ourselves of the fact that the states defined ethnic categories to label their minorities, and that these categories are characterized according to the environment in which they evolve. Thus, the 'Hill Tribes' category was created, concurrently with the problems it was supposed to bring: non-nationality, threat to national security, opium trafficking, communism or capitalism. The same process was enacted with the Chao Lay category, which also became an endonym[8]. The nation-state

8 This is developed further below in the present discussion.

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was created within borders, in a defined territory where common identities were deployed and imagined. The states are convinced that they should control their borders, but, in reality, these are the loci of identity creation by these labelled ethnic groups who can find in exclusion (and consequently forced integration) some of the tools for their continued ethnogenesis and for the perpetuation of Zomian dynamics within the state.

Having discussed some aspects of the role of the sea gypsies in the definition and control of a cosmological borderland, the coast, it is now necessary to mention the way administrative borders influence their identity. Traditionally, the social space of the Moken is trans-border, as is the case for the Urak Lawoi. Ivanoff (2004) described the social organization of the Moken in subgroups and flotillas attached to residential islands in the Mergui Archipelago. Until very recently, they would go from one island to the next aboard their *kabang* and would organize their society according to exogamy and uxorilocality. Since the recent increase in enforcing a closed Thai-Myanmar border (Boutry & Ivanoff 2009) and the establishment of a national park on the island of Surin in Thailand, traditionally occupied by the Moken, the interaction between the Moken of Thailand and the Moken of Myanmar became severely limited. Similarly, the Urak Lawoi who used to travel to the Moken islands in Myanmar no longer visit their 'cousins' as they are now in 'possession' of papers. Nevertheless, they continue to freely cross the Malay border, at least to Langkawi.

Meanwhile, as described by Boutry (2007b) in his PhD thesis, since the beginning of the 1990s the Burmese part of the Mergui Archipelago has begun to be progressively colonized by Burmese segments that settled there, subsequently becoming fishermen. The archipelago became a pioneer front and a productive arena for identity creation, where the encounter between the Burmese and the Moken resulted in new social dynamics. The Burmese, aware of the superiority of the Moken's knowledge of the sea, began to integrate elements of Moken beliefs into their Buddhist structure and to intermarry with the Moken, recreating the traditional *taukay* structure. This is what Boutry named 'cultural exogamy', a cultural dynamic aimed at creating a regionally defined set of interactions allowing the sharing and appropriation of a territory and its resources. Burmese *taukay* marrying Moken women, the incorporation of Moken altars into Burmese houses, the creation of a marine pantheon of regional *nat* (spirits), the invention of fishing techniques and allowing Moken and Burmese to collaborate in the exploitation of resources are all parts of the way interactions between both societies have produced a regional social system. Of course, this reminds us of the role played by the sea gypsies

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in Thailand in the appropriation of the coast as a cosmological territory and interface between the domesticated Buddhist world and the wild sea.

Nonetheless, since 2004, the *kabang*, the traditional Moken boat, started to become increasingly rare and was gradually abandoned. The tsunami that heralded the advent of NGOs, such as the Foundation for the People of Burma, possibly participated in this dynamic since NGOs partially destabilized Moken society during a transitional phase by introducing concepts incompatible with Moken identity. Schooling by the Karen, considered as sorcerers among the Moken, was implemented without any thought of the consequences. This forced the Moken to settle so their children would not be left alone and, as a result, for the first time in their history, they were no longer able to sustain their livelihood. Water and electricity were also installed. This responsibility was given to Burmese villagers and the Moken boats were sold to pay for the facilities they were forced to use.

Ivanoff states that during this period, a millenarian dynamic was being set among the Moken of Myanmar, who are waiting for the powerful shaman who will show them how to continue their nomadism. The era of the *kabang* is ending and the traditional annual ritual of the *lobung*, marking the passage to the rainy season and the beginning of seasonal sedentarity, is disappearing. Meanwhile, new forms of syncretic altars are appearing to give meaning to all these recent events and to the new elements they need to incorporate into their identity. These, as described by Ivanoff, are impressive mosaics constructed with multitudes of objects, such as a toy helicopter, representing the Burmese army, a fashion page of a Thai magazine representing a divinity or a dog puppet with the ability to see spirits. History is being changed and forgotten to allow the movement of a new society around its ideological pivots.

On the other side of the border, especially in Koh Surin, the Moken were subject to national policies aimed at integration and settlement. In national parks, the building of the *kabang* is forbidden (even if this is undertaken during the rainy season), as are several forms of hunting and gathering. In contrast to the Moklen and Urak Lawoi who fit more into the criteria defining Thainess (Ferrari 2009b, Ferrari & Arunotai 2010), the Moken are not granted Thai nationality (we can oppose this to intermarriage in Myanmar), as they are considered a trans-border population and a threat to national security. In reality, their nomadic way of life leads to the perception of them as 'wild', making them unworthy of nationhood and of the Thai evolutionist view of society.

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When the national park was created in 1981, the Moken themselves made the choice to stay on the island, asking only that the national park authorities act as *taukay* in order for them to evolve in a known social dynamic. This was of course refused and, instead, the Moken were subject to contradictory policies. Sometimes, they were hidden from tourists, and at other times, they were shown as an attraction. Their adaptability is nonetheless strong and has allowed them to resist and, nearly three decades after the creation of the national park, they are still able to perpetuate their identity and occupy an important place in Chao Lay society.

While the Moken in Myanmar have adapted their rituality to their situation, the Moken of Thailand still strongly rely on the *lobung* ceremony, which is at present a tourist attraction. Their rituality was in some ways frozen, in response to the views of outsiders and Thai ethnic policies, which tend to folklorize the visible cultural elements of their 'indigenous peoples'. However, within the emerging Chao Lay social space, this is a way to mark the difference between both Moklen and Urak Lawoi while maintaining important links. Therefore, if the *lobung* became a historical remnant, the Moken would start to celebrate ceremonies resembling the Urak Lawoi's *pladjak* (*loy ruea* in Thai, which means 'submerge the boat').

The administrative border between Thailand and Myanmar, while limiting trans-border contacts, has enhanced Chao Lay unity, resulting in social segmentation in the wider social space of the sea gypsies. On both sides of the border, different cultural strategies respond to different phenomena. The interaction between the Burmese pioneers and the Moken formulated a culturally based social system and drove the Moken towards a redefinition of their identity. This is an auto-inducted phenomenon if we compare it to what occurred in Thailand, where the unilateral intervention of the state pushed the Moken towards a slower dynamic and a redefinition of their interactions with the Moklen and Urak Lawoi. This is possibly one explanation for the present-day search for a Chao Lay unity in Thailand. The national integration of nomads presented them with new elements of identity to cope with and, in spite of the myriad of development projects they are subject to (especially since the tsunami), they have succeeded in keeping their identity intact by adapting it to the circumstances.

Furthermore, the emergence of different situations resulted in different social responses within Zomian dynamics. Again, the rationale is not only territory, but also the perpetuation of mobile identities. Social segmentation, as described by Boutry & Ivanoff (2008), is one strategy out of many allowing for the construction of new responses.

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## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to contribute to the understanding of the way interfaces or borderlands are integrated in the identity of the sea gypsies and to define their ethno-regional social integration. Furthermore, the intent was to show how territories in an ethno-regional social reality, such as Southern Thailand, are conceived and how cosmology and administration play complementary roles. Ultimately, we can reach an understanding of how modern Zomias persist and adapt to territorial conceptions.

We may propose the hypothesis that modern Zomias have to be looked at as imbricate structures. In the same way that the Moken and Moklen form a binomial (insular/littoral) relationship, regulating the degree of interaction and independence (as in Cambodia with the tributary belt, or in the Philippines among the Sama and Samal), regions such as Southern Thailand function as an interface between the ideologies of the nation-state and these restricted Zomias. These regions could be referred to as intermediary Zomias, allowing identity dynamics to take place outside the state. This is not only true of the sea gypsies, but also of the migrant Burmese, as Boutry has shown in this volume.

In this context, it is important to realize that the ways Zomian populations find their means of resistance lie in how interactions are conceived. These allow continuity between practices (ritual, economic or productive) and representations (cosmology, oral versus written literature or nationalistic discourse). In Southern Thailand, the attributes of the sea as perceived by the Indo-Buddhist world confer to the coast the role of a cosmological borderland. The sea gypsies' privileged relationship with the sea as a territory, alongside a long history that fashioned the cultural landscape of the Malay Peninsula, gives them legitimacy in littoral zones and provides them with an important social role. This is expressed clearly during the tenth month ceremony as well as in the power attributed to their ancestors and shamans. The same dynamic is observable in Myanmar, where the Burmese pioneers relied on their mastery of the sea to define the modality of their symbolic appropriation.

These ethno-regional social dynamics are found, in different forms, on both sides of the Thai-Myanmar border. The border does not alter the cosmological perception of the sea gypsies on the behalf of other populations. Instead, it influences the way interactions take place. In Myanmar, the relative independence of the Mergui Archipelago from governmental control (at least at the beginning) induced forms of creativity, allowing for the construction of a multi-ethnic social system over the period of a few

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years. In Thailand, the intervention of the government forced the Moken to adopt other strategies to perpetuate their identity.

Nonetheless, both of these processes happen in the cradle of an ethno-regional social organization in which the identity of the sea gypsies is directly related to their interface with other regional populations. These notions are cosmologically rooted and thus, even if subject to an illusional 'normalization' by the state and international organizations, they will still draw their resistance from their ethno-regional role and legitimacy. However, this resistance is not only designed by them, it is also based on the social architecture of the whole region and, because of this, the entire region is an intermediary Zomia. Sea gypsies are not exactly a stateless ethnic group, but their socio-political setting lies within regional, rather than national cultural dynamics.

Administrative and cosmological borders divide social, cultural or spiritual realities while enhancing their mutual relationship. Southern Thai ethno-regionalism is partly based on the management of these borderlands. To the north and south lie the administrative borders with Myanmar and Malaysia, the cradles of very dynamic forms of cultural creativity. To the north, as shown by Boutry & Ivanoff (2009), this is expressed in an 'adaptive colonization' of Burmese immigrants who are gradually finding their place in southern society. To the south, the border enhances the shaping of kinship ties and defines the way structural violence maintains Malay identity at the Malaysian border (Ivanoff 2010). To the west, the presence of the Sea Gypsies along a cosmological limit between the wild sea and domesticated land results in social dynamics in which nomads can find legitimacy and wider social roles. These are the social coordinates of Southern Thai ethno-regionalism, in which no dichotomy between centre and periphery can be defined as functioning in polymorphic and multidimensional ways according to scales and context (cultural, economic, political or religious).

These interfaces are fundamental in the understanding of ethno-regionalism since, despite their purposes, they continuously challenge the way multi-ethnic regions construct social space, feeding a unique social dynamism and resulting in novel definitions of the relationship between ethnicity and society. If the role of administrative borders is fundamental, it is also crucial that we take into account other forms of limits operating in the ethno-regional social fabric.

# About the Authors

**Frédéric Bourdier** is a senior anthropologist from the University of Bordeaux in France. He belongs to the public Research Institute for Development in France (IRD). He lived in south India for six years, working successively on the social categorization of health perceptions and practices in Tamil villages and on sociocultural changes within the family occurring at the time of the HIV epidemic. He conducted interdisciplinary research in the French and Brazilian Amazon on migration and health-related issues from 1999 to 2003 and was attached to the Museum Emilio Goeldi in Belém, Pará in North Brazil. In the meantime he went to Cambodia for the first time in 1994 and shared his life with the indigenous people, specifically the Tampuan in Ratanakiri province. Between 2004 and 2010 he was in charge of two consecutive French-Cambodian projects dealing with the policies and the challenges for the extension of antiretroviral drugs in the country, and the emergence of civil society in the fight against the epidemic. He periodically comes back to Ratanakiri in the village where he used to live. In addition, he is involved in an academic research project on Borderlands issues in South-East Asia (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Yunnan, Viêt Nam and Cambodia). Between 2010 and 2012, he was in charge of an international programme, sponsored by the Global Fund, dealing with migration, mobility and malaria in Cambodia. Since 2012 he is in charge of a three-year interdisciplinary research project (funded by the French National Agency of Research) dealing with health inequalities and malaria in the lower Mekong Region (South Laos, Western Highlands in Viêt Nam and Cambodia).

**Maxime Boutry** obtained a PhD in Social Anthropology and Ethnology at the School for Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS, Paris) in 2007, dealing with the appropriation of the marine environment by the Burmese fishermen in the Tenasserim (South Myanmar). Since then, he has been studying ethnicity construction processes notably through the interactions between Burmese fishermen and Moken (a few thousand sea gypsies inhabiting South Myanmar and South Thailand). Now an associate researcher of the Department Centre Asie du Sud-Est (CASE) of the French Center for Scientific Research (CNRS), he developed an anthropological thinking about the relevance of borderland studies to the study of identity, particularly the making of a Burmese identity from the peripheries of the social space. He recently coordinated a special issue of the journal *Moussons, Recherches en*

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*Sciences Sociales en Asie du Sud-Est* on this subject, entitled "The Moving Frontiers of Burma".

The relationships of "peripheral" populations to the States through an ethno-historical perspective led him to tackle very concrete and contemporary issues such as migrations and human trafficking between Myanmar and South Thailand, or the impact of humanitarian and development projects implemented in response to natural disasters, for example Cyclone Nargis, which struck the Ayeyarwaddy delta (Myanmar) on May 2, 2008.

**Olivier Ferrari** is associate researcher at the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (Bangkok) and lecturer at the Lausanne University (Switzerland). After a PhD in Geology, he continued his research in the field of Anthropology, concentrating on the sea gypsies of Southern Thailand. His work focuses on the interethnic interrelations that shape Southern Thailand, through their ritual and historical aspects. More particularly, he analyzes the ritual dynamics that display and facilitate interrelation in a cradle that is defined outside the control of the state, from the point of view of the sea gypsies.

Parallel to this, he works on issues related to development and environmental policies, particularly focusing on the ideological aspects related to them, and on their relationship with the realities observed at the local level.

A Doctor in Anthropology at the School for Higher Studies in Social Sciences (EHESS, Paris), **Jacques Ivanoff** works on multiple scales (local, regional, national, etc.) and studied the ethnic dynamics of the people living in the borderlands who use imaginary, political and geographic limits as cultural tools to adapt in a more and more globalized world. He focuses on interethnic relations and on social and economic consequences of national and international integration policies that expose the ideological construction of multiethnic States. He lived with the Austronesian Moken sea gypsies in Thailand and Myanmar for many years and then moved to Patani as a leader in an international project focusing on agronomy, archaeology, museology and anthropology.

Jacques Ivanoff collects the Austronesian Moken, Moklen and Malay oral literatures and created a large corpus to have a more comprehensive view on the migrations and inter-ethnic relationships in Southern Thailand.

Presently he works for the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the National Museum of Natural History, Department of Nature and Societies (UMR 7206 Éco-anthropologie et éthnobiologie).

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